

S E R M O N S
ON
SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY.

Published from the original Manuscripts,
By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

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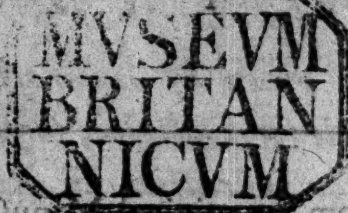
M D C C L X X I.

SERMONS

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MDCCLXXXI.

CONTENTS.

Five Sermons on Scripture.

SERMON I.

On the divine Inspiration of Scripture.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God:
and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for
Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness:
that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly
furnished unto all good Works.*

SERMONS II. III.

On the Usefulness of Scripture.

The same Text. p. 29, 57

SERMON IV.

On the Duty of reading it.

The same Text. p. 85

CONTENTS.

SERMON V.

Directions for reading it profitably.

The same Text.

p. 113

SERMON VI.

On the Lawfulness and Expediency of Forms
of Prayer.

I COR. xiv. 15.

*—I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray
with the Understanding also: I will sing with
the Spirit, and I will sing with the Under-
standing also.*

p. 141

SERMONS VII. VIII. IX. X. XI.

An Explanation and Defence of the Liturgy of
the Church of England.

The same Text.

p. 165, 191, 217, 241, 265

Five Sermons against Popery.

SERMON XII.

Scripture shewn to be the Rule of Christian
Faith and Practice. The Infallibility of the
Church and Tradition exploded.

1 PET.

CONTENTS

I PET. V. 12.

*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true
Grace of God wherein ye stand.* p. 293

SERMON XIII.

Against Prayers to Angels, Saints and the Vir-
gin Mary, Image-Worship, and Transub-
stantiation.

The same Text. p. 321

SERMON XIV.

Against communicating in one Kind only, the
Sacrifice of the Mass, auricular Confession,
private Absolution, Purgatory and Indul-
gences.

The same Text. p. 347

SERMON XV.

Against Extreme Unction, Prayers in an un-
known Tongue, Prohibition of the Scrip-
tures, equalling Apocryphal Books with Ca-
nonical, unwarrantable Number of Sacra-
ments, &c.

The same Text. p. 373

SER-

CONTENTS.

SERMON XVI.

General Pleas of the *Romanists* confuted, and
Rules of Conduct towards them given.

The same Text.

p. 397

SERMON XIV.

Against communicating in one Kind only, the
Sacrifice of the Mass, auricular Confession,
private Absolution, Purgatory and Indul-

SERMON XV.

Against Extreme Unction, Prayers in an un-
known Tongue, Prohibition of the Sale of
Bibles, expelling Apocryphal Books with Ca-

ERRATA.

- P. 126. L. 4. for *we* read *be*.
P. 163. L. 2. after *do* dele *it*.
P. 338. L. 11. for *as just* read *just as*.

ERRATA.

P. 100. L. 4. for "and" read "or".
P. 101. L. 1. after "as" insert "the".
P. 102. L. 1. for "as" read "and".

S E R M O N I.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God :
and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for
Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness :
that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly
furnished unto all good Works.*

MAN is by Nature ignorant and thought-
less : and therefore wants Information
and Admonition. He is also prone to
Evil, and averse from Good : and therefore wants
Restraint from the former, and Incitement to
the latter. Without the Assistance, which we
receive one from another in these Respects, we
should be wicked and wretched beyond Imagi-
nation. But though we should be most defec-
tive in a State of Solitude, yet we are very de-
plorably so, even when joined to the best
Advantage in Society. Many Points of the

utmost Moment, relating both to our present and future Condition, we either cannot discover at all, or not with Certainty: many, which we might, not even the wiser, much less the greater Part, have in Fact known: and those, which hardly any could fail to perceive, all have, more or less, failed to regard. Most of these Things are visibly Mens own Fault: and the rest are no Imputation upon God. For unquestionably he may with Justice place any of his Creatures in as low a State, both of Understanding and moral Ability, as he pleases: provided he requires from them, as he certainly will, only in Proportion to what he hath given. And even his infinite Goodness cannot oblige him to bestow on them greater Favours, than his infinite Wisdom sees to be proper: which it is no Wonder should act upon Reasons, to Us unsearchable. But the less we have Ground to expect, the more thankfully we ought to receive whatever Notices, Encouragements or Warnings, he may vouchsafe more immediately from Himself.

Now we have in our Hands a Book, which we call the *Bible*: containing Accounts of various Communications made to Mankind by their Creator from the Beginning; but principally

pally through the Hands of *Moses* and the Prophets; of *Jesus Christ* and his Disciples; together with great Numbers of most important Consequences from thence resulting. Both Parts of this Book are credibly affirmed to be written by Persons, who must in the main have known the Truth or Falsehood of what they say: none of whom have given Grounds to suspect their Veracity; but many, the strongest possible Grounds to rely on it. They support the Authority of the Doctrines and Precepts delivered there by express Prophecies and public Miracles, recounted there also: which Prophecies have, most of them, undeniably been since fulfilled, nor do any appear to have failed; and which Miracles, though they could never have been acknowledged if they had not been real, were, so far as we can learn, denied by no one, either at the Time when they were said to be done, or long after. On the contrary, the Old Testament hath always been admitted, as true and genuine, by the whole Jewish nation: and the Pentateuch in particular, used as the Law of their Country; though it appoints more Things than one to be done, so utterly and visibly contrary to human Policy, that they must proceed from Him,

whose extraordinary Providence alone could make them practicable with Safety; and others, too contrary to human Inclinations, for Men to have chosen, without being sure that God required them. And as to the Writers of the New Testament, it is still more certain, that their Works were published near the Time and in the Places, where they affirm the Events, which they relate, came to pass: that they agree surprisngly well, though in general they were unlearned Persons, and plainly had not concerted their Story together: that they led pious and virtuous Lives: that they were willing to suffer Death for the Sake of their Testimony. And accordingly the whole Christian Church from its Rise embraced their Narrations with a Faith, which neither Artifice nor Persecution were able to overturn, or keep it from prevailing throughout the World, though contrary to the favourite Notions and vicious Desires of all Mankind: which alone is a Proof, that the Facts related in them, even the most miraculous, were previously known to be true; and the Doctrines the same, which had been already taught by the Apostles: else Jews, Heathens and Christians must have exclaimed against the Authors, as Publishers of Falsehoods,

hoods, and they could never have obtained Credit. Some few of their Books indeed, (but such as taught no one Article that is not in the others, nor denied any one that is) were questioned in some Congregations for a good while; perhaps with more Caution than needed: but were then put on a Level with the rest. Neither Testament is pretended to be disproved, but both are confirmed, as far as could be expected, by such Heathen Records as are extant: and if either had been confuted formerly by any, that are now lost, it must have sunk; which hath not been the Case. Each of them furnishes powerful internal Evidence in Favour of itself: each adds manifold Strength to the other: and no Writings whatever stand on the Credit of such numerous and decisive Attestations.

Were we therefore to consider them merely as Compositions of excellent Men, well informed, and faithfully informing Us, in the best Manner they could, of what it most concerns us to know, we must allow them to be a most valuable Blessing; a Treasure unspeakably superior to all the other Remains of Antiquity. But this is much too low an Esteem of them: they were written moreover under the especial

Direction of Heaven, and that for an End no less important, than a full Supply of our spiritual Wants. These two Points the Apostle asserts plainly in the Text: and I shall endeavour to confirm and improve his Assertions, by shewing, in some Discourses upon it,

I. That all Scripture is of Divine Authority.

II. That it completely answers every Purpose of Religion.

III. That we ought to read and study it diligently.

IV. How we may do this to the best Effect.

I. That *all Scripture is* of divine Authority, or, in St. Paul's Language, *given by Inspiration of God*: a Position extremely requisite to be understood in its true Sense, and established on its proper Foundation. For some have held it to signify, that every Sentence and Word was dictated from above: and consequently have made Room, without intending it, for as many plausible Objections, as there are Appearances of any Thing, which in respect of Clearness, Elegance, Order, Strength, exceeds not human Power, or falls beneath absolute Perfection. Others, especially of late Years, partly to guard against this Danger, and partly to excuse Notions of their own, which are con-

trary

trary to Scripture, have imagined, that being inspired meant little more (at least in Relation to the Historical and Doctrinal Books) than being indued with a large Measure of general pious Intention: so that, continuing to call themselves Christians, and professing a high Respect for the sacred Writers as good Men, they have thought themselves justified in doubting, or even disbelieving, almost as much as they please, of what the Scriptures teach.

To state therefore and defend the Sense of the Text, I shall begin with explaining the Terms. The Word, here translated *Scripture*, denotes frequently in other Authors any Writing whatever. Whence some ancient Versions render the Original thus: *Every Writing, given by Inspiration of God, is profitable*, and so forth: leaving it undetermined, which are so given. But always, in the Gospels and Epistles, it denotes that Collection of Writings, which the Church acknowledged for its Rule of Life and Manners. When our Apostle sent this Epistle to *Timothy*, several Parts of the New Testament were not published, and scarce any had spread very far: so that he must by *Scripture* mean chiefly, if not solely, the Old Testament. But the Books of the New, from their first Ap-

pearance, obtained the same Title every where. St. *Peter* gives it by the plainest Implication to what St. *Paul* wrote^a: and doubtless what He, and the rest of the twelve, wrote, equally deserved it. Inspiration is any particular Influence of God on the Mind: whence we pray in the Communion Service, that he would *cleanse our Hearts by the Inspiration of his Holy Spirit*. But, in the Case before us, it must signify such Influence, as will be effectual for the Purpose of writing such Books. And of this there may be various Degrees requisite, and therefore granted, according to the Variety of Circumstances. Moving a Person inwardly to undertake the Work is one Degree. Superintending him during the Execution of it, so as to preserve him from any considerable Mistake or Omission, is another. Preserving him from all, even the least, is a higher still. Enabling him to express himself in a Manner loftier, clearer, more convincing or more affecting, than he could have done otherwise, is yet a further Step. Suggesting to him also the Matter, which he shall deliver, goes beyond the former, especially if he was unacquainted with it till then. And putting into his Mouth the very

^a 2 Pet. iii. 16.

S E R M O N I.

9

Words he shall use, is the completest Guidance, that can be.

Now we say not, that God hath done all these Things in every Part of Scripture: but so many in each, as were needful. That He directed *Moses* to write his Laws^b, and *Isaiab*^c, and *Ezekiel*^d and *Habakkuk*^e, Part at least of their Prophecies, and *Jeremiah* the Whole of his^f, and St. *John* the Book of Revelation^g, they themselves positively assure us: and by Parity of Reason we may presume it concerning the rest: nor can we doubt, but that, writing in Obedience to his Command, they wrote so, as he approved. On some Occasions perhaps they wanted, and therefore had, no extraordinary Assistance. Without this, the Historians amongst them might relate several Facts from their own personal Knowledge, others from authentic Records: and *Moses* might receive his Accounts of the earliest Ages from undoubted Tradition. For Tradition was much longer credible, when there were but few Things to commit to Memory, and there was no other Way of preserving them, and two or

^b Exod. xxxiv. 27. Comp. xxiv. 4. Deut. xxxi. 9, 22.
^c Is. viii. 1. xxx. 8. ^d Ezek. xliii. 11. ^e Hab. ii. 2.
^f Jer. xxx. 2. xxxvi. 2, 28. ^g Rev. i. 11, 19.

three Generations lasted many Centuries. The Writers of the *Psalms* might often chuse their own Subjects, and treat them suitably to their own Genius. The wise King, and other Compilers of the *Proverbs*, might perpetuate their own Maxims. The Authors of the *Epistles* may well be supposed to have given the many small Directions, which we find in them, solely from the Dictates of their own Prudence. The Authors of all the Books might be trusted very commonly to use their own Stile and Method, (in which accordingly there is much Diversity) nay, even their own Illustrations, Arguments and Reasonings, on the Points before them. And yet, amidst all this, the watchful Eye of God might sufficiently provide against their misleading into Error and Sin, or omitting to instruct in any Thing essential, those, whom they were appointed to make wise unto Salvation^a.

That he hath superintended them thus far, is evident from the Necessity of his doing it. The Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian Revelations, which are contained, with their principal Evidences, in these Books, could not be known with Certainty otherwise than by Means

^a 2 Tim. iii. 15.

of them, after some Time, though they might at first by Word of Mouth. And therefore to prevent his gracious Intention towards every succeeding Generation from being frustrated, undoubtedly God would take Care, that the Scripture should teach us infallibly what he required us to believe and do: which was impossible, if his Truths and the Imaginations of his Creatures were blended in them promiscuously; or indeed, if they were only left to express themselves as they could, properly or improperly, concerning abstruse and difficult Matters, (as there are many such in the sacred Writings,) where a small Error in their Phrase might occasion a great one in our Belief or Conduct. For on this Supposition, how should we distinguish with Safety in Matters of such Moment: and where shall they, who reject any one Article, find a sure Place to stop at? Fatal Experience hath proved continually, that they can find none. And consequently our wise and good Maker would effectually preserve Writings of such infinite Importance, not only from gross Errors, but from the very smallest in Faith or Practice, and, one should think, in Arguings and Facts also: the former being often affected by the latter.

But

But this is not all: he must have interposed much farther. We find Passages throughout, so sublime, so pathetic, full of such Energy and Force upon the Heart and Conscience; yet without the least Appearance of Labour and Study for that Purpose: indeed the Design of the Whole is so noble, so well suited to the sad Condition of human Kind; the Morals have in them such Purity and Dignity; the Doctrines are many of them so much above Reason, yet all of them so reconcileable with it; the Expression is so majestic, yet familiarised with such easy Simplicity; that the more we read and study these Books with pious Dispositions and judicious Attention, the more we shall see and feel of the Hand of God in them; and without fixing distinctly on this or that Text, be fully satisfied in the Gross, that no mere Men, and yet less unlearned Men, as several of the Writers were, could ever approach to such Perfection, (far superior to that of the most admired Heathens,) without being raised vastly above themselves by supernatural Aid. But then if we consider also the accurate Agreement and Correspondence of the several Parts, though of very different Natures, written at very different Times, under very different Dispensations of Religion,

6

Religion, and Scenes of worldly Affairs; that, numerous and various as they are, they unite nevertheless into one consistent and connected Scheme, and the more evidently so, the stricter Inquiry is made into it; this will greatly strengthen the Proof of divine Suggestions, as well as Restraints. For such Harmony must proceed from one original Plan, formed in the Mind of God, Portions of which only were communicated to the several Publishers of it; yet each of them was influenced from above to so punctual an Execution of his respective Trust, that what he said, perfectly tallied with what he was ignorant of, till at length the whole was completed by our blessed Redeemer; *in whom all the Building, fitly framed together, grew up into a holy Temple in the Lord*¹.

But after this general View, let us enter into some Particulars. The *Mosaic* Law, if at all from God, was dictated by God: for it affirms itself to be so. The Contents of the prophetic Books are, Predictions of future Events, and Commissions to deliver such and such Instructions to the People. These also, if true, (as the Completions of the former demonstrate that they were,) must have been suggested. One of the Prophets declares,

¹ Eph. ii. 21.

that

that *he heard, but understood not*^{*}. Others of them St. *Peter* describes, as *diligently searching* into the Times and Circumstances, to which their Messages related[†]. And probably they all apprehended the Meaning of a great Part of them but imperfectly. Now we may be certain, that God would effectually incline them to deliver these, by using the very Words, which they received. And in the rest they would of Course endeavour it, and have their Memories undoubtedly strengthened, as far as needed, to perform it. Some Revelations indeed were made to them, not by Words, but by visible Appearances, or Impressions on their Imagination. Here again we cannot question, but they were enabled to relate them in proper Terms. Farther yet: many of the *Psalms* are plainly prophetical, and even the Historical Books contain Prophecies: these also must have been suggested from above. The very Histories are, some of them, such as Man could not know, some such, as in all Likelihood the Writers did not know, of themselves, or from other Men: therefore God must have communicated them too. And from the Beginning to the End of Scripture are such Numbers of Things of such

^{*} Dan. xii. 8.

[†] 1 Pet. i. 11.

exalted Excellency, that we may well say of the Writer, concerning each of them, as our Saviour doth to St. Peter : *Flesh and Blood both not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven* ^m.

However, as we Christians are most immediately concerned with the New Testament, and proving its divine Authority singly will prove that of the Old, which is every where asserted in it, I shall dwell upon this Point more largely.

The Evangelists give us not only a circumstantial Account of our Saviour's Journies, Miracles, Sufferings, Resurrection, but frequent Narrations of his Discourses likewise: some of them very long, all of them together making up near half the Gospels; and St. *John*, who wrote the last, hath the most of them. We, who have heard and read them frequently, were we now to read one of the larger again, should scarce be able to repeat it, without considerable Omissions, nay without Variations altering the Sense. The Disciples at the Time were far from comprehending them all: it is no where affirmed, that they wrote any of them down, till several Years after: probably some

^m Matt. xvi. 17.

of the Gospels were not published within twenty or thirty Years or more. Yet a small Failure in representing the Doctrine of their Master, his Vindications of himself, his Predictions of future Events, nay, any Thing of Moment, that he did or that befell him, (especially considering how many Things were foretold concerning him) might have been extremely detrimental to Christianity. And therefore assuredly they would never have dared to specify such a Variety of Particulars, both said and done; or if they had, could never have agreed so well in them, without supernatural Assistance. But they well knew, they should have it.

Our Saviour, before his Death, promised them, that *the Holy Ghost should teach them all Things, and bring all Things to their Remembrance, whatsoever he had said to them*ⁿ, and *guide them into all Truth*^o. He assured them, *it was expedient for them, that he should go away*, because, till then, he could not, consistently with the Purposes of infinite Wisdom, send the Spirit to them^p: whence it must follow; that by the Aid of the Spirit, they were as secure from Error, as if they had (what after they were dispersed to preach the Gospel

ⁿ John xiv. 26.^o John xvi. 13.^p John xvi. 7.

was impossible) Christ bodily present with them, to ask concerning the Things which they had heard or seen. He told them farther, that when they should be brought before Governors and Kings to bear Testimony for him, it should be given them, in that same Hour, what they should speak: for, saith he, *it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father, which speaketh in you*⁹. To pretend, that this Promise means only Courage and Presence of Mind, is contrary to all Reason, and all Use of Scripture Language. And if it means, as it evidently doth, divine Superintendence; they certainly wanted, and therefore would have, at least as much of it, when they wrote Books, which God foresaw (whether They did or not) must be the only standing Rule of Christian Faith for ever, as when they spoke occasionally before this or that Heathen Magistrate.

The Assurances, which he vouchsafed to them, we read, were fully made good. After his Resurrection he said to them, *As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you: then he breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost*¹⁰. After his Ascension, they were filled with his

⁹ Matt. x. 18, 19, 20. Comp. Luke xii. 11, 12. ¹⁰ John xxi. 21, 22.

Gifts yet more abundantly, *spake with other Tongues, as the Spirit gave them Utterance*; discerned the Secrets of Mens Hearts, foretold Things to come, performed the very greatest of Miracles, had frequent Revelations from above, seem to have done nothing of Moment without an especial Guidance. Surely then, they, who were thus under God's Direction, did not write the New Testament without it: they who confirmed in this Manner what they taught, were not capable of leaving unmentioned any fundamental Truth, and yet less of teaching any Error.

Now two of these, *Matthew* and *John*, Apostles and Companions of our Lord, are also Evangelists. The latter was peculiarly beloved of our Saviour while on Earth, and afterwards saw in Vision and heard from his Mouth, and that of an Angel, all that is contained in the Book of *Revelation*: whence we not only infer its infallible Authority, but are strongly confirmed in our Belief, that the Spirit of *Jesus* was present with him in writing his Gospel and Epistles also. The two other Evangelists indeed, *Mark* and *Luke*, were not Apostles: but their Works were approved by St. *Peter* and St.

^r Acts ii. 4.

IV. *Paul,*

Paul, who were: and all the four Gospels have ever been held in equal Esteem. The Book of *Acts* is a Sequel of the third, which the Writer would not fail to lay before the same Apostle, who had inspected his Gospel: especially as it principally relates to him, and ends at the Time when they were together at *Rome*, and at full Leisure to revise it jointly.

It is true, *St. Paul* himself was not one of the twelve. But *he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of them*¹; being miraculously called to see that just One, to hear the Voice of his Mouth²; and to receive his Gospel, not of Man, but by the immediate Revelation of *Jesus Christ*³. Certainly then he was not suffered either to misrepresent or suppress any Part of it, whether speaking or writing, or to deliver any Thing, as comprehended in it, which was not. But let us hear what he saith of his own Preaching. *We speak the Things given unto us of God, not in the Words, which Man's Wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*⁴. *When ye received the Word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the Word of Men, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God*⁵. Let us hear

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 5.² 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13.³ Acts xxii. 14.⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 13.⁵ Gal. i. 12.

what he saith of his own Epistles. *If any Man think himself a Prophet or Spiritual,*^y that is, indued with supernatural Gifts, *let him acknowledge, that the Things, which I write unto you, are the Commandments of the Lord*^y. He therefore, *that despiseth, despiseth not Man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit*^z. Yet we may be confident, *that he did not boast of himself beyond his Measure*^z, or dare to speak of any Thing, which Christ had not wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient, by Word and Deed, by mighty Signs and Wonders, by the Power of the Spirit of God^b. And observe, he doth not, after all this, any where exalt himself above the other Apostles: but he places all the Apostles above the Prophets^c: which likewise in Effect St. Peter doth, when having first exhorted Christians to be mindful of the Words, which were spoken before by the holy Prophets, he adds, in yet stronger Terms, and of the Commandment of us, the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour^d. St. John also, in his first Epistle, uses Language, in general, of the same high Import. *He that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not*

^y 1 Cor. xiv. 37.
^b Rom. xv. 18, 19.

^z 1 Thess. iv. 8.
^c 1 Cor. xii. 28.

^a 2 Cor. x. 13.
^d 2 Pet. iii. 2.

us. Hereby know we the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit of Error. Could such eminent Saints, could any religious and humble, or commonly honest, Men, provoke God, and attempt to deceive their Fellow Creatures, by making such Claims as these, without Foundation? Would not he instantly have withdrawn his Gifts from them? Would not their Enviars and Rivals, for such there were, have exposed them? Would not all Christians by common Consent have rejected them? Certainly they would: yet certainly they did just the contrary.

The only two Writers of the New Testament, whom I have not yet named particularly, are *St. James* and *St. Jude*: of whom it may be very sufficient to observe, that they were both Apostles, and near Kinsmen of our Lord, and therefore might well expect the same Regard with the rest; which, by the whole Tenour of their Epistles, they appear to do, though without demanding it so expressly, for which they had probably no Occasion.

Still we acknowledge, that some Christians at *Antioch* disputed one Part of what *Paul* and *Barnabas* taught there: and afterwards, when the Apostles held a Council at *Jerusalem* upon it,

^c 1 John iv. 6.

certain *Pharisees*, who were Believers, debated the same Point^f. But no Wonder, if new Converts, full of old Prejudices, were backward to part with them, where the Honour of the Law seemed to be impaired by it, considering how obstinately refractory their Forefathers had been to known Prophets, and to *Moses* himself. However, being with great Condescension heard, then instructed by St. *James* and St. *Peter*, they submitted. Yet, we own farther, in the Decree made on this Occasion, where the Apostles say, *It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*, they join the Elders and Brethren with them. But so doth St. *Paul* join one or other with Him in no less than eight of his Epistles^g: and in both Cases the Meaning plainly is, not to allow them equal Authority, but merely to express their Concurrence.

Indeed the Apostles themselves were not led into all Truth at once: but this is very consistent with being secured from any Error. They were also liable to act imprudently: as St. *Peter* did, when he separated himself from the *Gentiles* at *Antioch*, fearing to offend the be-

^f Acts xv. 1, &c. ^g 1 Cor. i. 1. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 1, 2. Phil. i. 1. Col. i. 1. 1 Thess. i. 1. 2 Thess. i. 1. Philem. ver. 1.

lieving *Jews*, for which St. *Paul* blamed him^a; and as perhaps even *Paul* too did, when not knowing the High Priest, he reprov'd him so severely, though deservedly¹. But there was not the least Falsehood asserted by either: and the Behaviour of both turned to the Advantage of Christianity. Some have objected to the Inspiration of the latter, that in one Place he only saith, *He thinks he bath the Spirit of God*². But this ironical seeming Doubt was designed to imply the strongest Affirmation, and to put his Adversaries to Shame. They object also, that in the same Chapter he distinguishes the Directions, which Christ had given in Person, from his own¹. And He doth so: but what is this more, than a most amiable Expression of Humility, and Respect to his dear Lord? A few Persons have likewise apprehended, that when he saith to the *Corinthians*, *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*^m, and again to the *Thessalonians*, *For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent, go to Heaven before, those which are asleep*ⁿ; he meant, that the general Resur-

^a Gal. ii. 11, &c. ¹ Acts xxiii. 2, &c. ² 1 Cor. vii. 40.
¹ 1 Cor. vii. 12. ^m 1 Cor. xv. 51. ⁿ 1 Thess. iv. 15.

rection was to be in his Days, and therefore erred. But plainly he did not: for in his second Epistle to the latter, written the same Year, he cautions them against misunderstanding, (as it seems they some of them had done,) what he said on that Head in his first: and mentions Things, which were to intervene between his own Days and the Resurrection, and must take up Time°. In other Epistles too, he speaks of his own dying, first as likely°, then as certain to happen soon°. And therefore by *We*, in the Places objected, he meant only in general, *We*, or such of us, Christians: not designing to intimate, that He himself should be one of the Number. In this Sense he frequently uses both, *We*, and even, *I*, elsewhere, as many approved Authors have done in different Nations and Ages.

Objections have been raised against various Passages of holy Writ, besides the above-mentioned. Some have been thought hard to reconcile with the moral Attributes of God: some with each other. To examine them here particularly would be much too long. General Observations, capable, I hope, of removing or obviating the principal Difficulties, especially of

° 2 Thess. ii. 1, &c. ° Phil. i. 20. ° 2 Tim. iv. 6.

the former Sort, shall, God willing, be made in the Sequel of these Discourses. But without doing that, it might be sufficient to say, that reasonable Answers have been already given to them: that many of them, which once appeared to be of the greatest Importance, have been fully shewn to be of none: from whence alone we may justly presume, that whatever is wanting to clear up the rest will be supplied in Time by the Blessing of God on the continued Labours of pious and learned Men: and that in the mean while, instead of thinking ill of the Scriptures, we ought to think humbly of ourselves, and be persuaded, that in these Points we do not understand them.

Such, as were most eminent for Piety and Knowledge, and have enjoyed the greatest Advantages for judging of Scripture, have always esteemed it of divine Original. The Christians of the first and second Centuries, who must have known personally, whether the Books of the New Testament were authentic, who had been Companions of the Apostles and their immediate Successors, who must have been taught by Them, what Honour both Testaments deserved, and would have been restrained by Them from

* This last is Justin Martyr's Rule, Dial. with Trypho, § 65.

paying them too much, paid them the very highest. All, who came after, exalted them above the most valuable Compositions of the most early Fathers, by the strongest Expressions of peculiar Regard: and this Regard was universal. None but the absurdest and vilest of Heretics refused, and that on the poorest Pretences, to be tried by their Authority. All others, whatever else they differed in, agreed in acknowledging the Infallibility of the Bible, to which they were forced to attempt reconciling their Tenets, as well as they could. In later Days, we confess, Papists have spoken slightly of it, and Libertines much worse: both however for bad Reasons; because it condemns the religious Notions and Practices of the former, and the irreligious ones of the latter. But all unprejudiced and serious Men, in Proportion to their natural Abilities, acquired Knowledge, and Attention to study it, have held it to this Day in Reverence: and in Proportion as that Reverence hath influenced their Hearts and Lives, have been Examples and Blessings to all around them.

Let us therefore walk in their Steps, and be heartily thankful; first, that God hath not left us (undeserving Wretches as we are) to our

own

own Conjectures and Imaginations concerning what we are to believe and to do, to hope and to fear, but made gracious Discoveries of Himself, his Will and Purposes, to Mankind; then, that he hath not left these Discoveries to come down to us, and our Posterity, through the uncertain Conveyance of oral Tradition, which quickly fails, or of casual Writers, who might err in some Points necessary, and pass by others unmentioned; but hath excited fit Persons to record his Truths; exalted their Faculties, and strengthened their Memories, where it was needful; suggested to them many Things, watched over them in all. Let us receive their Communications with the utmost Respect, and read them with the utmost Care, as the Means of our Salvation: and if amidst a great deal, that is highly useful and incomparably excellent, we meet sometimes with Things, for which we are unable to account; let us indeed seek for Solutions diligently, and be willing to admit any fair, any possible one, rather than a Mistake in the sacred Writings: but though we should meet with no Solution, let us consider, that humble Faith becomes us much better, than haughty Contradiction; modest Suspense, than rash Positiveness: for that God knows every

every Thing, and we know little; that others perhaps now, and we ourselves after farther Inquiry, may see very distinctly what at present we see not at all; and, (which alone may suffice to our Satisfaction) that whatever else may be dark or doubtful, or seem exceptionable, there is abundantly enough, clearly and indisputably written, to answer the End of all; that we may believe, that *Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing we may have Life through his Name*.*

* John xx. 31.

S E R M O N II.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God: and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness: that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.

I. **I**N my preceding Discourse I proved to you the Divine Authority of Scripture; and now go on, as was proposed, to shew

II. Its complete Usefulness. This the Apostle hath expressed by saying, *it is profitable for Doctrine*, or teaching religious Truths; *for Reproof*, or Confutation of the opposite Notions and Practices; *for Correction*, that is, Amendment of those, whom it reproves; *for Instruction in Righteousness*, that is, leading good

good Persons on to still higher Degrees of Perfection.

Had the Writers of it been left to themselves, yet being worthy Men, and well informed of what they wrote, it would have been extremely useful. But as they were superintended by the Spirit of God, it must be unspeakably more so: in particular, because we may with absolute Security rely on it in all Points. Whatever it teaches, we may safely learn; and it teaches the whole of Christianity; the Historical Facts, the Articles of Faith, the Rules of Life, the Promises, the Threatenings, the Exhortations, the Examples. From Scripture chiefly, and almost solely, we come to know, that God is infinitely perfect, and made the World; that Man is fallen and redeemed; that he hath eternal Happiness or Misery set before him; and what the Means are of procuring the one, and avoiding the other. For Reason could discover but little of these Things, and did discover much less; and Tradition is unable to convey any Thing far down with Certainty. In this narrow Compass lies the Proof, and it is a complete Proof, of the Benefits that we may receive from holy Writ. However it hath graciously condescended to
invite

invite Us to partake of them, by specifying them more distinctly. I shall only mention a few of those, which are enumerated in one Psalm, the 119th. You will judge from thence of the rest. *Wherewithal shall a young Man cleanse his Way? Even by ruling himself after thy Word^a. Thy Words have I hid within my Heart, that I might not sin against thee^b. Thy Testimonies are my Delight and my Counsellors^c. So shall I have wherewith to answer him, that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy Word^d. I will walk at Liberty, for I seek thy Commandments^e. Thy Statutes have been my Songs in the House of my Pilgrimage^f. The Law of thy Mouth is dearer unto me, than Thousands of Gold and Silver^g. If my Delight had not been in thy Law, I should have perished in my Trouble^h. Through thy Commandment I get Understanding: therefore I hate all evil Waysⁱ. Thy Word is a Lamp unto my Feet, and a Light unto my Paths^k. Thy Testimonies have I claimed as mine Heritage for ever: and why? they are the very Joy of my Heart^l. Great Peace have they, which love thy Law, and nothing shall offend them^m.*

^a v. 9. ^b v. 11. ^c v. 24. ^d v. 42. ^e v. 45.
^f v. 54. ^g v. 72. ^h v. 92. ⁱ v. 104. ^k v. 105.
^l v. 111. ^m v. 165.

These and many other Advantages, which the inspired Writings ascribe to themselves, are also in Reason to be expected from them; the Authors had experienced them; all pious Men have experienced them since; every one, that will, may at this Hour. And therefore I shall enlarge no farther at present on the direct Evidence of them; but proceed to answer the Objections of those, who are hindered by unjust Prepossessions from trying them: who either contest the Usefulness of Scripture, in order to overturn its Authority; or, which is wonderfully inconsistent, think very lowly of the former, while they acknowledge the latter. For I fear many entertain injurious Opinions of the Word of God, without daring to own it, even to themselves: which influence them powerfully, though secretly, first to read, then to esteem it, less and less; then to indulge a Life unsuitable to it, and perhaps in the last Place to reject it entirely. These ensnaring Sentiments therefore I shall plainly bring forth into your View without Disguise, and confute them; that you may have Answers ready to the bad Suggestions of other Men, or your own Minds.

It is said then, that these Books are not in our own Language, but in Translations, which
most

most of us must take upon Trust, and which often differ. But have Men the least Pretence to say, that God shall not instruct them, unless he will convey his Instructions to them in all the several Tongues of the several Countries and Ages of the World? Is it not better, that he should give them in any one, than in none? Are we not informed by Translations of the most important Events, that have passed formerly upon Earth? Do not most of the Subjects of some large Empires to this Day learn the Will of their Sovereign from Translations? And what if the Translations of some Parts of Scripture vary? They agree in the Main: and there can be no gross Impositions; because the Clergy of one Communion will be sure to detect those of others in such Attempts; and there are Multitudes of learned Laity also in Lands of Freedom; and it is the common Interest of all Persons not to be deceived.

It is said further, that one should expect a Book, written by Direction from God for instructing the World in Religion, to be a short plain methodical System of Belief and Practice, unincumbered with any other Matters: and the Bible is quite a different Thing. But is not

the whole System of Nature, and the whole Conduct of Providence, quite a different Thing from what one should have expected? Had we been set to imagine before-hand, what Sort of a World God would create, and in what Manner he would govern it; we should none of us have pitched on such a Creation and Government, as we see in fact: but had the Scheme of either come into our Thoughts, we should probably have fancied there were innumerable and insuperable Objections against it. And hence we should learn, that, in the Case of Revelation also, our Fancies are not the Measure of God's Proceedings; but we are humbly to acquiesce in whatever it appears by proper Evidence that he hath done, and not erect ourselves into Judges of what he ought to do, or in what Manner. Hear his own Words: *My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways my Ways, saith the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my Ways higher than your Ways, and my Thoughts than your Thoughtsⁿ.* The Proceedings of Divine Wisdom will always justify themselves to human Inquiry, so

ⁿ Is. lv. 8, 9.

far as we are capable of comprehending them. But of Necessity many of God's Actions must be infinitely more beyond our Reach, than the Actions of a prudent Man are beyond that of a little Child. And were the whole Plan of Scripture such, as in our first crude Notions we should have conceived likely; that very Circumstance would have furnished a Presumption against it: whereas now we have Cause to look on it with that Reverence, which the Psalmist expresses: *Thy Testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my Soul keep them*°. However let us enter a little more particularly into the Merits of this Plea.

The Instruction given us in the Bible, we are told, is not ranged in a just Method: but we are to pick out the Doctrines and Precepts of it often from the Midst of Histories and Prophecies, and put them together as we can. But is not the natural Instruction, which God gives us, just of the same Sort? Are we not obliged to gather almost the Whole of it, from Hints and Intimations afforded by Objects dispersed through the Earth; from Observations, Experiments and Reasonings of Persons, who have lived in different Countries and Ages? Yet

° Ps. cxix. 129.

these are undeniably the Means, which he hath appointed to furnish us with one Part of our Knowledge. And why then may not the Scripture, notwithstanding its apparent Want of Order, be the Means, which he hath appointed to furnish us with another Part? It is alledged yet farther, that some very curious and interesting Things are entirely omitted, or but briefly hinted there: while some very obvious ones are inculcated, and repeated without End. But curious Things are Part of them probably unfit to be known perfectly at present: and we may well be content to *see now through a Glass darkly*, since hereafter we shall see *Face to Face*^p. Again, such of them, as may properly be known, are useful in Comparison to few; who also will seek after them with more Spirit, and discover them with more Joy, when they must *search for them as for hid Treasures*^q: whereas plain Things are useful for all; and therefore should be easily found: for most Minds cannot labour. Besides, consider how it is in worldly Things: look around you: are not Matters of small Price, but great Utility, the commonest? And must not they, who will have Things that are curious and rare, seek after

^p Prov. ii. 4. ^q 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

them with Difficulty, and pay dear for them? Farther, had every Thing in the Bible been easy of Access to us, in proportion as we were likely to place a Value upon it; we should soon have looked it through, then have laid it down, and seldom taken it up again: whereas now we return to it over and over, in fresh Hopes of discovering something more: and at each Reading, we meet, whether we will or not, with the commonest indeed, but most necessary Doctrines and Precepts, in such a Variety of Lights assisting each other, and they are sometimes impressed so suddenly and advantageously upon us, that if our Understandings are not gratified with the most beautiful Arrangement, and most entertaining Speculations, our Hearts are however excited to Acts and Habits of Faith and Virtue with the strongest Efficacy. Besides, Repetitions might be extremely necessary, in different Books, written at different Times: and may be very useful even now, when these Books are laid before us all at once, to inculcate what after all we learn insufficiently.

But further yet: The Scripture is not indeed a Plan of Christianity, finished with minute Accuracy, to instruct Men as in something al-

together new to them, which it was not; or to excite a vain Admiration in them: but it is somewhat unspeakably nobler, and more extensive; comprehending in the grandest and most magnificent Order, along with every Essential of that Plan, the various Dispensations of God to Mankind from the forming of this Earth to the Consummation of all Things. It begins with the Ground-work of natural Religion, the Creation of the Universe by one holy and good and wise Being: relating distinctly, how all those Parts of it, which the Heathen worshipped as Gods, were in Truth the Work of God's Hands. It proceeds to the Origin of the Patriarchal, *Jewish* and Christian Religion, the Introduction of Sin by the Fall of our first Parents, of which we experience the wretched Effects. It goes on to that amazing Punishment of Sin, the universal Deluge, proved to be as certain, as it was wonderful, by the remaining Traces of it throughout the Globe. It then recites the second Peopling of the World, the Relapse of Mankind into Wickedness, the Choice of one Family and People to preserve the Knowledge of God, and to be as a *Light shining in a dark Place*, for the Benefit

2 Pet. i. 19.

of all about them, that would turn their Eyes and Feet to the Way of Peace. It lays before us the Laws given to this People. It recounts their History, chiefly with Regard to their moral and religious Behaviour, and dwells on the Characters and Actions of their most remarkable Persons. It supplies us with admirable Patterns of genuine Piety in the *Psalms*, most virtuous Instructions for the prudent Conduct of Life in the Book of *Proverbs*, for bearing Afflictions in that of *Job*, for thinking justly of Wealth, Honour, Pleasure, Science, in *Ecclesiastes*. Then in the prophetical Books it gives us, together with the sublimest and worthiest Ideas of God, and our Duties towards him, the most affecting Denunciations of that private and public Misery and Ruin, which will ever attend Sin, whether cloaked by Superstition, or displayed in Profaneness. And, along with all these Things, it unfolds a Series of Predictions, reaching from the Beginning of the Old Testament to the End; and growing, from obscure and general, continually clearer and more determinate; concerning the Appearance of a Divine Person on Earth, for the Recovery of fallen Man, the Revival and Propagation of true Religion throughout the World. The

Books of the New Testament open to us the Execution of this great Design. The Gospels record his supernatural Birth, his unspotted and exemplary Life, his astonishing and gracious Miracles, his pure and benevolent Doctrine, his dying for our Offences, and rising again for our Justification; his Mission of fit Persons, endued with the Gifts of the holy Spirit to teach all Nations; his own Ascension into Heaven, and sitting at the right Hand of God, till he shall come to judge the Quick and the Dead. The Acts of the Apostles relate the wonderful Success of their Preaching, and the original Foundation of the Catholic Church. The Epistles contain their admirable Directions to Clergy and Laity. And the Revelation concludes with foretelling the State of Christianity, primitive, degenerate and reformed, to the last Ages. Can there now be a grander, a more comprehensive, a more useful Scheme of Instruction than this? And doth not the Uniformity and Variety joined through the whole of it, which, as I have already shewn you, gives Evidence of its coming from God, give it also inexpressible Beauty? And what then if smaller Parts, in so vast a Work, appear in some Disorder, barren and

* Rom. iv. 25.

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

neglected?

neglected? Do we not see the same Appearance of Neglect, here and there, through all the Works of Nature? Yet they are the Productions of an all-wise Being. Are we not even struck with it, as majestic and graceful in human Performances? And why do we object against it in the Word of God? Or by what Right do miserable Sinners claim, that their Maker, if he sends them Declarations of his Will, and Offers of Pardon, shall polish every Article to their Liking, or subjoin his Reasons to each Part, when his Authority is fully sufficient?

But to obviate more distinctly Objections against the Profitableness of Scripture, let us examine more particularly the several Sorts of Books, that compose it. In the earlier historical Parts, amongst many most important Accounts of ancient Time, which we can learn no where else, there are some Things imperfectly related. But perhaps the Writer knew them but imperfectly: and God was not bound to give him a fuller Knowledge. The Persons, for whom they were primarily written, understood them sufficiently by means of what is said: and we have no Right to understand more of them than we do, indeed not so much.

Other

Other Passages again seem of small Consequence. But they might be of far greater formerly. The Genealogies of those, by whom the Earth was first peopled, and of considerable Families in succeeding Ages, even the dry Catalogues of Names, were, at the Time of their being recorded, and long after, partly Confirmations of the Truth of the History, partly Notices of Things very interesting. The Division of the Land of *Canaan* in *Joshua*, the List of Descents in the Beginning of *Chronicles*, were Titles to Inheritances. The Pedigree of the *Levites* was necessary to regulate their Ministrations: that of the Posterity of *David*, to ascertain the Birth of the Messiah. If these, and other Parts of the Narration, are not equally agreeable or instructive now, it is easy to pass them over. We have no Ground to complain of losing the Entertainment or Information, which others formerly had from them: for we are abundantly recompensed by being taught many most material Things, of which Men in those Days were ignorant. Yet neither had they any just Ground to complain. For God may full as consistently with all his Attributes communicate more to one than to another by Revelation, as by their natural Abilities, and
Situation

Situation in Life. The Discoveries, which he hath made in Scripture, are progressive; some to one Age, greater to the next: and those, which he hath decreed to be made by natural Reason, are in this Respect of the same Kind. Every Generation goes off unacquainted with a Number of desirable and beneficial Things, which the succeeding ones come to know familiarly.

It is farther alledged, that we read in the Bible of very bad Actions, done by such as are called very good Persons: and Men are in Danger of being misled by them. But are they not in almost equal Danger of being misled by seeing good Persons do bad Actions almost every Day? And if this is no Objection against the Providence of God, why is the other against his Word? Sometimes the Connexion of the Story requires them to be told: and they are seldom, if ever, told without a Censure, either expressed or visibly implied, unless the Sin be so very notorious, as to need none. At least the Precepts of the sacred Books are a Guard, more than sufficient, against the ill Influence of any such Histories: which will never do Harm, provided we remember but this one plain Rule, that nothing contrary to moral Virtue is or can be designed

igned to be taught there. On the contrary, they may serve to various useful Purposes. Recording the Sins of those, who in the main were eminently pious, is one Proof, amongst many, of the Impartiality of the Writers; and furnishes every Reader with strong Motives, to Circumspection, lest He also fall; to Repentance, when he hath fallen; to Humility in thinking of himself, to Charity in Respect of others, *who are overtaken in Faults*.

There are likewise, it must be owned, Actions not only related in Scripture, but related with the Appearance, nay with Expressions, of Approbation, and even said to be commanded by God, that seem at the first View liable to great Objections in Point of Morality. And these are pleaded by some against its Authority, by others against its Usefulness. But then it must be observed, as to such Commands, that God hath a sovereign Right to dispose of all his Creatures as He pleases; that he may have many Reasons for his Pleasure, of which we are ignorant; that he may as allowably appoint any Person or People to execute it, as the civil Magistrate may appoint an Executioner of common Justice; and that by Virtue of such Divine

Gal. vi. 1.

Ap-

Appointments, well proved, as those in Scripture are. Things may be very lawfully done, which otherwise would be very unlawful; and which therefore were not intended, (nor can easily be mistaken, if we will use our Understandings at all) for Patterns to be followed where no Revelations are given; and in our Days none are to be expected. Such, for Instance, was the Command to *Abraham* for sacrificing his Son; to the *Jews* for destroying the *Canaanites*; and to other Persons on other Occasions. Again, sometimes God is represented by the sacred Writers not only as commanding, but as doing himself, Things hard to reconcile with his Attributes. But then plainly on several Occasions Scripture seems to say, that he doth, what it only means to say, that he permits: because nothing is done without him, and every Thing is over-ruled by him to his own good Purposes. Time will not permit me to enter into every Particular: and therefore I must be content to add in general, that if we bear always in Mind, as we ought, the absolute Sovereignty of God, and the unsearchable Depths of his Wisdom; if we allow for Circumstances, probably well known when the History of these Facts was written, and
therefore

therefore less needful to be related; or indeed if we only pay due Regard to Circumstances, which are related, in that very Part of Scripture, or some other; we shall either find the Means of clearing up the Difficulties of this Nature which occur, especially by calling in proper Help; or however we shall perceive it to be likely, from the Discoveries which have been made already, that they will be cleared up hereafter. And reflect, I entreat you, what can we say more than this, concerning several Parts of God's Creation, which seem to be noxious instead of beneficial, and of his Providence, which seem hurtful to the Interests of Piety and Virtue; and yet undoubtedly proceed from him, and are worthy of him? To one Use at least, and that of the greatest Moment, all such Things are adapted, to teach us, from a Sense of our own Ignorance, deep Self-Abasement, and implicit Veneration for the Lord of All.

Another Part of Scripture, pretended by some to be unprofitable and unaccountable, is that, which lays before us the ceremonial Precepts of the *Jewish* Law. But no Wonder, if when we are not bound to practise any of them, we are not able to account for all of them. Some, which

which appear to the illiterate very strange, are proved by the learned to be wise Prohibitions of the Superstitions and idolatrous Rites of their heathen Neighbours; and others to be equally wise Compliances with, or Accommodations to, their innocent Customs. And how do we know, at such a Distance of Time, what a Number more there may have been of this Kind? Some again seem designed to convey, under their literal Sense, figurative moral Instructions; That being a Method of teaching anciently admired, and therefore proper to be imitated ^v. Not a few were plainly contrived to give Intimations beforehand concerning the Facts and Doctrines of the Gospel: very comfortable at the Time, though obscure, as God saw fit they should be; very useful now, by proving, what was always the Divine Intention; and particularly useful against the *Jews*, who thus bear Testimony to the very Books, that confute them. Besides, it might be, independently on all this, extremely necessary for that carnal People to be employed in a pompous Form of Piety with many Ceremonies: which,

^v Concerning symbolical Laws, and the Unfitness of requiring to know the Reasons of ancient Institutions, see Authorities of the Pandects, and Passages of Heathen Writers, in *Taylor's Elements of Civil Law*, p. 45, 46, 47.

however,

however, they had sufficient Means of knowing were of no Avail, without inward Goodness. And the conducting of Religion in Purity, through such a State of Things, is no small Evidence, that the Hand which conducted it was God's. But were the Communication of these ritual Appointments to us, no otherwise advantageous, it would shew us the happy Superiority of our own Condition, who worship God without them *in Spirit and in Truth*^a. But lastly, the Pentateuch, which contains them, contains over and above many Things of unspeakable Importance, not only to the Proof, but the Understanding of Christianity. We must have both conveyed down to us in it, or neither. Which would we chuse? And where is the Injury, if in order to give all that is profitable, our Maker gives more than is necessary?

Exceptions have been also taken to the Book of *Psalms*, as having in it frequent Imprecations against Enemies, which may tempt us to the like. But most of them, if not all, might full as agreeably to the Genius of the *Hebrew Language*, have been translated as Predictions only^y, which in the Case of Sinners being ge-

^a John iv. 23, 24.

^y Gregory the Great, *De Cura Pastoral.* Part i. c. i. p. 5. saith, the Psalmist wrote *Pf. lxxvii. 23. non optantis animo, sed prophetantis ministerio.*

nerally conditional (to take Effect unless they repent) were in Reality nothing more than Warnings, and therefore Kindnesses indeed to the Offenders, against whom they were denounced. Or if the holy Penmen were sometimes commissioned by Inspiration to foretell absolutely, and even to call down the Judgements of God on wicked Persons, how can this be likely to mislead us, who know such Commissions to be ceased, and our standing Rule to be, *Bless, and curse not* *?

It hath been objected too against the Book of *Ecclesiastes*, that some Passages in it favour of Irreligion, some of Immorality. But these in Truth are either innocent, when rightly interpreted; or else express, not the wise King's Sentiments, but the false Opinions of others, whom he personates to confute them; or however not his deliberate Sentiments, but such hasty wrong Notions, as during the Course of his Inquiry after Happiness rose up successively in his Mind, and were on mature Consideration rejected by him, to fix at last on the true Basis, *the Conclusion of the whole Matter, to fear God and keep his Commandments, because he shall bring every Work into Judgement, with every*

* Rom. xii. 14.

secret Thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil *.

The *Song of Solomon* hath likewise given Offence to Readers of more Delicacy than Judgement. But they would do well to recollect, that the intimate Relation between God, or Christ, and the Church, is figured by that between Husband and Wife in many Places, both of the Old and New Testament, particularly in the 45th Psalm, which (though the Scene of it be laid in higher Life) seems to have given Occasion to this Song; that very indearing and improving Reflections naturally rise from so interesting a Comparison; that describing the Intercourse by Metaphors drawn from the pastoral State, is extremely agreeable to the Simplicity, the Humility, the Mildness of Religion; that the devotional, as well as other Affections of the Eastern People, are extremely warm; and that none of their Allegories (especially such a one as that in Question) are ever to be applied minutely: but we are to lay hold and dwell on the principal Points; of Love to God producing Felicity; Negligence, Desertion; Penitence, Forgiveness: considering most of the rest as mere Ornament, adapted with much Conde-

* Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

seension to the Turn of the Nation and the Age.

But Difficulties have been raised in Relation to the prophetical Books, as well as these. Directions, it is said, are mentioned, as given in them to the Prophets, which appear improbable and unfit. But then we may justly think, as the ablest of the *Jews* themselves have thought, that several of these were executed in Vision only: a supernatural Impression was made on their Minds, by which they seemed to do what in Fact they did not, that so they might be enabled to deliver their Message in a more affecting Manner. And who shall prescribe to God, how to communicate his Revelations? Other strange Things really done by them, were done in Consequence of the universal Custom, then in Use, of instructing Persons by Actions, which are natural Signs, along with, or instead of, Words, which are but arbitrary ones. And if that Custom had not been so proper and convenient, as perhaps it is; yet God's Compliance with it, whilst it obtained, was undoubtedly gracious and fitted to produce good Effects.

Again some have complained, that the Language of the Prophets, above the rest of Scrip-

ture, is often harsh and coarse, dark and peculiar; and on these Accounts ill adapted to common Benefit. But surely it is also, very often, extremely natural and easy, convincing and persuasive, alarming and forcible, graceful and engaging. Wherever it seems exceptionable therefore, large Allowances must be made for the Boldness and consequent Obscurity of the original Tongue, especially in Poetry: which yet in all Tongues is more affecting, and more easily remembered, than Prose; and on these Accounts prudently chosen in many Parts of the prophetic Writings. But indeed the Style of the Oriental People on every Subject, except in their History, is lofty and concise, abounding in strong and expressive Figures, carried often to strange Lengths, above regarding the little Niceties that we think so essential, full of quick Turns and abrupt Transitions. Without such Ornaments as these a Composition would appear languid and despicable to Them; who, being the Persons originally and immediately interested in the sacred Books, ought surely to be more considered than we, who come so long after. And yet even we, with due Attention, may discover, not only the utmost Sublimity of Sense, in the hardest Passages, but the most exquisite

Beauties of Speech, profusely scattered throughout, like the Riches of Nature through the Globe; though, like them too, with a magnificent Negligence and Irregularity, which little Wits ridicule, and great ones admire; and pious Hearts very justly reverence, as the worthier of God, the remoter it is from the laboured Correctness of Man. But had the *Jewish* Language (while they spoke *Hebrew* or *Chaldee*, or when afterwards many of them spoke *Greek*) been still more obscure and ambiguous than we must own it to be, and had that Defect been less compensated with the Advantages of Expressiveness and Grandeur than it is, yet this was not the Fault, either of the Prophets, or of the Apostles. They would of Course learn and use the Stile of their Countrymen: they wrote probably as well in it, as any other good Men of their Time; and God was not bound to teach them to write better. For how far he would extend his Aid, was entirely in his own Choice; and we owe him inexpressible Gratitude for the *Things* he hath communicated, how little soever he might interfere in directing the *Words*. But indeed had they been endued with ever so great Excellency of Speech, they could have applied to

their Hearers or Readers in no other Phrases, than such as they comprehended, were accustomed, and would hearken, to: and the Difficulties arising from hence in the sacred Writings were unavoidable.

But here a farther Complaint is made, that in several Places they are designedly guarded against being clearly understood. And we own they are: for the Subject required it. Predictions too plain might hinder their own Execution: as, in many common Cases, the previous Publication of a Thing, which else would certainly have been done, will prevent it most effectually. And therefore they ought to be formed in the Manner they are: so as not to betray the Intention to every one prematurely, nor yet leave Room to any one for doubting afterwards, to what Event the Prophecy related. Had all the Particulars of our Saviour's Life and Death, which are foretold, been too distinctly set forth to be mistaken or overlooked, the *Jews* would have taken Care they should not happen; and have justified their Rejection of him by the Failure. Again: had the Kingdom of the Messiah been every where described by the Prophets as intirely a spiritual one, in which all Mankind were to have an equal Share;

Share; that perverse Nation, on hearing, that their civil Polity and ceremonial Worship was all to be abolished, would either, from Contempt, have grown negligent of it, and thrown it off too soon; or else, from Fondness for it, would have suppressed or corrupted the Passages, declaring it should cease: which Providence designed them to preserve, for an Evidence against themselves, as they have proved to be. And therefore the Gospel Days are prefigured by a Mixture of temporal Images with others, liable to be misunderstood before the Time of Explanation came, but soon apprehended then by every fair Mind; though still open to the Cavils of others, who, to use the Terms of St. Peter, *stumble at the Word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed*^b. Not, *appointed to be disobedient*: but appointed, since they would be disobedient, to take their own Course and the Consequences of it: to *stumble* and fall at Difficulties, of which they would easily have seen the proper Solution, and so got over them unhurt, had they but modestly begged, and dutifully followed, the divine Illumination.

I cannot proceed now to the Objections, which have been raised against the Usefulness

^b 1 Pet. ii. 8.

of the Books of the New Testament: and therefore contenting myself at present with recommending to your Consideration what you have heard, shall conclude with the comfortable, yet awful Words of the Prophet: *Who is wise, and he shall understand these Things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the Ways of the Lord are right, and the Just shall walk in them: but the Transgressors shall fall therein.*

Hos. xiv. 9.

S E R M O N III.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God :
and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for
Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness :
that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly
furnished unto all good Works.*

HAVING undertaken to shew you

I. That Scripture is of Divine Authority ;

II. That it answers every Purpose of Religion ;

III. That we ought to read and study it diligently ;

IV. How we may do this to the best Effect :

I have finished the first Head, and made some Progress in the second, the complete Usefulness of holy Writ. The direct Evidence of this I laid before you, fully I hope, though briefly,

briefly, for it lies in a small Compass: by proving, that in the Nature of the Thing, Books inspired to give Men the Knowledge of Religion must be in the highest Degree profitable for that End; by specifying their own express Declarations, that they are so; by referring you to the Experience of innumerable Multitudes, that have found them so. Then I proceeded to answer the several Objections raised against the Truth of this Assertion: some of them general, that the Bible is not so short, so plain, so methodical as one should have expected for the Benefit of Mankind; some again particular, and levelled against several Things recorded in its several Parts. To these I gave Solutions, as far as the Old Testament was concerned. Let us now go on to the New.

The History of our Saviour is written there by four Evangelists. And some tell us their Narrations differ in so many Things, that the reading of them is perplexing, and even their Authority doubtful. But what are these Things? The Words, related in one Evangelist, as spoken on such or such an Occasion, vary from those in another. But perhaps the Words, that are in each, were spoken successively: or each puts the *Hebrew* Words, which he heard, into his own

own *Greek*, by a stricter or a freer Translation, but still without altering the Sense. Again, one sets down Facts, which another omits. But this is no Proof of Contradiction. For they professedly omit many Facts, which they knew to be real. One of them passes over Things, because another before him had related them. Hence probably St. *Matthew* and St. *Mark* omit several Particulars, which are in St. *Luke*, who wrote first. And St. *John*, who came last, supplies a great deal, which the others have not, and writes very little, which they have; excepting the History of our Saviour's Death and Resurrection, which it was fit they should all have. Thus no single Gospel containing every Thing, (though it did contain every Thing necessary) each of them was shorter, and therefore much more commodiously obtained at first, when Books were written very slowly, and sold very dear; so that he who could not procure the four, might however furnish himself with one: and we may now have the joint Benefit of them all. But farther, when they seem to be relating the same Fact, the Circumstances differ. And they may be different, yet consistent. Or if they be inconsistent, they are two Facts, and not one, though

though in some Respects alike. For our Saviour might, at various Times, both perform Miracles and deliver Discourses, nearly akin, and yet really distinct. Still after all, even allowing for these Things, it is not easy to make an orderly History of our Saviour's Life and Instructions out of the four Evangelists. For they did not think it, nor was it always, requisite, to mark down the Order, in which Things happened. They might, for one good Cause or other, relate such of them together, as were not done together: but then, as they do not say they were, this is no Falsehood. And learned Men, agreeing in the main, though not in all Particulars, have brought them to a Harmony each with the other, only by allowing a very few Things to have been transposed in one of them. But were the Attempt harder than it is, our Edification from our Saviour's Discourses depends very little on the Time, or Place, or other Circumstances, of their Delivery. Common Persons need not attend to such Points at all: and Persons of more Ability will find both a Trial of their Impartiality, and a Reward of their Labour, in studying them. Indeed were the ablest Men incapable of reconciling all Difficulties, it doth not follow, that they are irreconcilable,

conciliable. Or though they were, the Consequence would be only, that the divine Superintendency, under which the Authors wrote, extended not to such minute Circumstances, though it did and must to Doctrines and Precepts, and principal Facts *. Not very much therefore would be lost by this: and one Advantage would be gained; that these Diversities would still more evidently shew, (what indeed the whole Air and Manner of their Writings shews) that the Evangelists are absolutely free from all Imputation of concerting their Story together, to deceive Mankind: the Assurance of which makes good Amends in Respect of Usefulness, for any Perplexities we may find in adjusting their Accounts.

Another Complaint is, that our Saviour's Parables, which make up a considerable Part of his Doctrine in the three first Evangelists, are obscure, and some of them purposely made so: and that a great deal of what he saith in the fourth is not clearer. But it should be considered, that Parables were not only an admired Way of teaching then, but a valuable one in

* Concerning this Matter see Gaussen, *de verbo Dei*, §. 64, &c. See also Archbishop Potter's Lectures, p. 141, &c. where the Opinions of Erasmus, Episcopus, Grotius, &c. are stated.

their own Nature; as they excite Attention, please the Imagination, and fasten upon the Memory. And nothing can be more intelligible, or more beautifully persuasive, than most, if not all, of our Saviour's Parables, and other Discourses, are now, and were in a very short Time after his own Days. Some of both indeed appeared, and were designed to appear, otherwise, when he spoke them. But these were accommodated with the utmost Prudence, for letting in Light upon his Hearers by gentle Degrees, which, if poured on them all at once, would have been too strong for many Persons of good Meaning, but whose Prejudices required to be gradually worn off; and would have furnished Handles to bad People, for decrying him successfully, and destroying him, before his Ministry had taken due Root. Perhaps it may be thought, that to the latter some of his Censures were too severe, and some of his Answers not direct enough. But they came from one, who knew the Hearts of Men, and spoke to what he saw there. The Persons, to whom these Censures, or these Answers, were particularly directed, felt the Propriety of them, though possibly the rest, even of the By-standers, were unable to perceive it: no Wonder then, if we are less able.

able. And yet the Writers of the Gospels could do no otherwise, than set down what he said, just in the Manner that he said it, however dark it might be to us, or to themselves.

But his Precepts also, as well as others in Scripture, are said by some to be so general and undetermined, that without proper Limitations of them, (which all Men will not think of making, and few can make in every Case rightly) they must either lead us into Errors, or leave us uncertain what we are to do. Yet concise Maxims of sententious Wisdom have always been esteemed in all Nations extremely useful, notwithstanding that somewhat remained to be supplied in them by the common Sense of the Hearers or Readers: which must indeed be done, more or less, in every Thing written or spoken. And a Book, that should be framed to give Rules of Action in all the particular Circumstances of every Case that would happen, would be much too voluminous for vulgar Use, and too intricate for vulgar Understandings: whereas Rules that set the Heart right in the principal Points, will go a great Way towards setting the Conduct right in all. Besides, there is in general very small Danger, that Precepts of Piety and Morals will be taken in too comprehensive

prehensive and severe a Sense. And therefore the main Business is, to make them comprehensive and severe enough, which it will be allowed the Scripture hath done: and yet with such Openings for the rational Interpretation of them, that there is no one Command, in the Gospels or elsewhere, of which the most illiterate Person, who is at all attentive and discreet, may not sufficiently apprehend the just Bounds; either by his own Comparison of them with other Texts, or however by the Help of such farther Instruction and Explication, as in worldly Affairs Men are well content to ask and receive, and would scarce know any one Thing upon Earth without it. If People have not Ability and Leisure enough to find out their Duty, from the Directions in the Bible, much less would they ever deduce the whole, or any considerable Part of it, from its first Principles, by the mere Light of Nature. And whatever Pretences are made, that the Injunctions of Scripture are not determinate enough, the true inward Objection commonly is, that they are too determinate against some favourite Inclinations: whereas, were Men left to make a System for themselves, they could easily mould and bend the Laws of Conduct to their own Liking.

Against

Against the Usefulness of *the Acts of the Apostles*, which is evidently very great, I think there are no peculiar Exceptions taken, worth mentioning here. For the Difficulties, raised on some Points of History in the Speeches of *St. Stephen* and *Gamaliel*, are not material, and have been sufficiently cleared up. But heavy Charges are brought against the Epistles of *St. Paul*, authorized, we are told, by *St. Peter* himself, who affirms, that *some Things in them are hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own Destruction*^b. But doth *St. Peter* mean here to censure *St. Paul*; whom he calls, in the preceding Verse, his *beloved Brother*; who, he saith, *hath written according to the Wisdom given unto him*, that is from above; and to whose Writings he refers Christians for fuller Instruction concerning what he himself is teaching? Certainly not, unless he censures the other Scriptures too: for he speaks of them all in just the same Terms. And therefore he only gives a Caution concerning Passages, which, either from the Abstruseness of the Subject, the Impropriety of explaining it fully at that Time, or God's Purpose of trying the Reader's Fair-

^b 2 Pet. iii. 16.

ness of Mind, were involved in some Obscurity. And even of these he doth not say, either that not understanding them at all would be dangerous; (for, though useful Truths, they might come short of necessary ones, or might be more intelligibly taught elsewhere;) or that all Persons would be in Danger from understanding them wrongly; but only *the unlearned*, that is, unacquainted with the Doctrines of Religion, for he speaks of no other Learning; and *the unstable*, or unsettled in their Dispositions, who have no Root of Steadfastness in Faith or Practice. Nor doth he say of these, that weakly mistaking such Passages might be *their Destruction*, but violently *wresting* and torturing them, to ill Senses, for ill Purposes. By Usage of this Kind, a hard Text or two may be wickedly perverted to contradict ever so many plain ones, in the most necessary Articles of Belief or Duty: and the Condemnation of such as do it, and persist in it, is just. But how can any Argument be drawn from hence, to disprove the Usefulness of the sacred Books? The Books of Nature and Providence, it will surely be owned, are useful, and to be read by all Men. Yet are there not, in Them likewise, *Things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable,*

ble, which the most learned and best grounded, (in their own Opinions) *wrest* to the Service of Atheism, Infidelity, Superstition, Immorality; and so ruin themselves in the next Life, perhaps in this too?

Doubtless the Epistles of St. *Paul* are in many Places difficult. In some he pours out the Abundance of his Knowledge and Piety so copiously, that common Capacities are unable to receive it all, seem lost amidst the Profusion of it, and are forced to let a great deal flow by unapprehended, at least till after frequent attentive Readings; in every one of which however they imbibe most refreshing and strengthening Nourishment. Sometimes again, indeed often, he visibly refers to the then present State of the several Churches; to various Questions, which they had proposed to him; to Customs entertained by them; to erroneous Notions, remaining or started up amongst them: which Notions too he appears to confute, now and then, by Reasonings taken from other Notions of theirs, possibly some of them erroneous likewise, or however doubtful; that so, by entangling them in their own mistaken Persuasions, they might be induced to throw them all aside, and take up juster and more consistent Princi-

ples. Now as we have no other Knowledge of these Things, in our Days, than we can collect from the Epistles themselves; no Wonder, if we are sometimes much at a Loss. But to the Persons who received them, we have Cause to think, they were very intelligible: and the Condescension of arguing with them in their own Way must be very obliging, and the Effect of the whole thoroughly convincing: else they had not continued to honour Him and his Writings in the Manner and Degree, which we know they did. Nor is it very hard for Us now to understand the far greatest Part of them: and the Profit well repays the Labour. But the Parts of more general and especially practical Use, which make a large Share of the whole, we cannot avoid understanding. So that on the whole his own Words concerning his teaching are perfectly justifiable: *If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them that believe not.*

To the Epistles, which follow St. Paul's, no considerable Objection is made. For, as to any Pretence of Difference between Him and St. James, about Faith and Works, the former

^c 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

evidently

evidently means only, that neither Observance of the Peculiarities of the *Mosaic* Law, nor the exact Observance of any Law, is requisite for our Acceptance with God, but Faith in his Covenant of Forgiveness through Christ: and the latter means only, that this Faith must be such, as produces an honest and diligent, though not faultless, Performance of such Works, as that Covenant prescribes; otherwise it is dead and fruitless: which two Doctrines are perfectly consistent, and absolutely necessary to the Comfort and Direction of Mankind.

The concluding Book of Scripture, *the Revelation of St. John*, is accused of Obscurity, and consequently of Uselessness, perhaps beyond any other. But it should be observed in Regard to this and all of them, that it may be very material, in Religion as well as in Philosophy, to have some Information about Matters, which yet we can understand but very imperfectly: and though there were more Things than there are, not at all understood now; yet these either have been understood by those, whom they concerned formerly, or will be understood by those, whom they shall concern hereafter: as unquestionably in Nature many Things, which have never been cleared up,

nor their Uses known as yet, will be cleared up in Time to very good Purpose. And who can tell how glorious a Light may one Day burst forth, and how seasonably, from the darkest and least regarded Prophecies both of the Old Testament and the New, to confirm the Evidence and illustrate the Doctrines of Christianity? But in the mean while, they exercise very beneficially the Industry of many, the Humility and Reverence of all. Though we should never find the Meaning of some of them, we may, by searching after it, find that of others unexpectedly, as happens in various Cases besides. And further still, be some Parts of Scripture ever so unintelligible, we have this Comfort, that they cannot make the clear ones unintelligible too.

Yet here it is answered by the bolder Sort of Objectors, that no Body can say, what is clear in Scripture: there are Diversities of Opinion about the most fundamental Points of Revelation. Every Thing is disputed; every Disputant alledges what he calls plain Texts in his Favour: and how can there be a stronger Proof, than this from Fact, that the whole System of the Bible is obscure and uncertain, and therefore of little Use? But consider; Are not the
funda-

S E R M O N III.

71

Fundamental Points of natural Religion, of Morality, of civil Government, disputed too? Have not all the Principles of Science, the Credibility of History, the very Evidence of Sense, been controverted? And doth not every Body appeal to plain Reason in these Controversies, just as they do to plain Scripture in those of Theology? And do they not all make a Shift to say something plausible for themselves, or against their Adversaries? And will not this be always the Case, as long as there are in the World conceited or perverse, ignorant or inconsiderate, interested or ambitious Persons? But must we therefore give up every Thing for doubtful, and useless? Or if not, why must we give up Scripture? Why not trust ourselves, that we see what we do see, there no less than elsewhere, notwithstanding that there may be Persons, who pretend to see the contrary? Infidels venture to be very positive in their Notions, though the ablest, the best, the Generality of Men reject them, though they differ widely amongst themselves about them; though, when searched to the Bottom, they are unspeakably more difficult to understand, and more unsatisfactory, so far as they are understood, than Ours. Why then do we suffer them

to unsettle Us by Pleas, that hold stronger against themselves?

Another very material Consideration is this. However dark and perplexing some would have the Bible thought, in Fact it is certain, that wherever it hath been respected and carefully read, the very lowest of the People have had infinitely juster Sentiments of God and their Duty, than the highest in other Places. The Passages, which it is pretended must needs give them wrong and gross Ideas, of the Divine Nature and Attributes for Instance, of a future State, or of any Thing else, do in Reality scarce ever produce that Effect in any of them; but either they understand the boldest Figures easily, or at least know they are but Figures; and therefore though they may not apprehend them distinctly, they are not misled by them at all. Indeed the very Foundation of that whole Way of arguing, which confident Persons use on this Subject, is wrong: and we need not embarrass ourselves about the Particulars of it so much as we do. They have suggested, that if Heaven vouchsafed a Revelation to Mankind, it must certainly be the most beautiful Composition, in the clearest Language and the most regular Method possible; every Thing must be fully explained

plained in it, nothing capable of being contradicted or doubted; and every Part of the World must be put in Possession of it. Now we find that this is not true of the Old and New Testament, and therefore some are inclined to question, whether indeed they are Gifts of God, or, however, Gifts of any extraordinary Value. But the same Persons might just as well have suggested, that all the Knowledge he gives us by natural Means also must be easily acquired, perfect and universal; which we experience it not to be. God hath provided Remedies for the Diseases of our Bodies: the greatest Blessing we have, next to those for the Wants of our Souls. But ^d many of them were unknown to Mankind till very lately, are known but to few now, perhaps very many, that will be known, are not discovered yet. Multitudes have believed in Medicines and Methods of no Use at all: several of the best have been despised, rejected, ridiculed; fierce and long Disputes have arisen about the Nature and Benefit of others; and perhaps, after much Pains taken, much Uncertainty still remains: the most efficacious and approved are often disagreeable and disgusting; unskilfully or dishonestly applied, they

^d See Bishop Butler's Analogy, p. 265, 266.

have

have often very bad Effects, and oftener yet produce their good ones but slowly and imperfectly. Yet we cannot, and we do not, doubt, but there are such Things as real Remedies, which a kind Providence, deserving our sincerest Thanks, hath bestowed on us. And why then should we hesitate about the divine Original, or sovereign Usefulness, of the holy Scriptures, merely because they are attended with some Disadvantages of the same Sort? Indeed whatever Way of Reasoning would prove, that our Maker is obliged to relieve either our temporal or spiritual Disorders in the Manner we could wish, will prove equally that he is obliged to prevent both: the contrary of which we daily feel. Therefore suppose the Bible had such Imperfections in it, as it hath not, no more would follow, than that God had extended his Direction and Assistance to the Writers of it only to a certain Degree: we could never conclude, that he had not directed and assisted them, as far as the Purposes of Religion required. It may be said he could have guarded it against all possible Misconstructions, and Objections. But perhaps not without making Man a different Creature from what he is; for weak Men will stumble, and wicked Men cavil, at every

every Thing: or not without making Scripture so different from what it is, that on the whole it would have answered the several Ends, for which it was designed, less than it doth. It may be said farther, that at least he could easily have guarded it against many of the Objections, which have been made. But perhaps he foresaw, that if he had, others would have been made in their Stead: or he thought fit to exercise the Industry of some Persons, and try the Uprightness of others. In short, we must suffer the all-wise God, both to govern his World, and to reveal his Will, in his own Way.

But a careful and judicious Inspection will shew in his Word, as it doth in his Works, not only that Beauty and Use abound much more than was conceived at first View; but that many imagined Deformities are real Excellencies; and many seemingly worthless or inconvenient Things, necessary or beneficial: whereas the finest Pieces of human Art seldom fail of sinking in their Character upon accurate Examination and frequent Review. There are Passages in Scripture so lofty, that most Eyes are unable, without Help, to see their Meaning distinctly. And, why should there not be Things above common Reach, to excite and reward the Attempts

tempts of the able and diligent ; to prevent their being fatiated with plain Doctrines alone, till they grow weary of them ; and to give them the Pleasure of communicating, and others of receiving from them, the Discoveries they make : just as, in worldly Affairs, God hath appointed, that some shall be rich and charitable, others poor and thankful ; and thus hath provided in the best and wisest Manner for All ? There are again Passages of such great Simplicity and Plainness, that they appear to some low and flat. But then, not only different Subjects, and Manners of treating them, require very different Styles ; but all Nations and Ages have their peculiar Forms of Expression, their Circumlocutions and Repetitions, which, however mean or tedious they may seem to others, yet seem to them graceful and proper : and such as endeavour to teach and influence them (as the sacred Writers did the *Jews* and first Christian Converts,) do well to comply with established Usage in these Things, even though they could mend it. For this Reason the Authors of the New Testament, had they been Masters of the most elegant *Greek*, would have acted wisely in preferring to it that vulgar Kind, which the Persons, to whom they wrote, ordinarily

6

dinarily used, and understood better *. Besides, artless and unadorned Narrations and Exhortations are best suited to common Capacities; and carry in them some Evidence, that they are not contrived to amuse and deceive: for in that Case they would have been more laboured and ornamented. We have no Cause therefore, from the Roughness and uncouth Prolixity of some Parts, to think Scripture ill calculated for the Profit of its Readers; amongst whom its first Readers were first to be regarded: but we have much Cause from the Dignity, the Persuasiveness, the Energy of other Parts, to conclude *it is the Power of God unto Salvation*: for else, *whence had these Men all these Things*? We have no Cause in the least to blame it for what we do not comprehend; but abundant Cause to admire it for what we do; and to argue, like *Socrates* on reading the Works of *Heraclitus*: “So much
“ as I understand is excellent, and therefore I
“ believe the rest is so too.” We want to have the Bible, each according to his natural Dispo-

* See Mosheim's *Cogitationes de Interpretatione SS. litterarum*, p. 176. where he defends the unpolite Style of Scripture, as most intelligible to the Generality, and supports his Defence by the Authority of *Orig. contra Cels. l. vi.* And *Sext. Emp. lib. i. adv. Mathematicos seu lib. i. c. 10. adv. Grammaticos*, §. 234. p. 265. Ed. Fabr. † *Rom. i. 16.* ‡ *Matt. xiii. 56.*

sition,

sition, or acquired Way of thinking, every where sublime, or easy, or elegant, or methodical, or copious, or concise. But God hath most wisely made it *all Things to all Men*^a: hath furnished it with the clearest and most mysterious, the loftiest and most familiar, the closest and most diffuse, the best connected and the abruptest Passages, all perfectly suited to his gracious Purposes: and it is monstrous Perverseness in Us, to make each his own Capacity the Measure of the whole; reckon every Thing, that happens to rise above us, unintelligible; every Thing, that condescends to those beneath us, contemptible; and so on.

But then farther we ought to consider, that the latest Books of the Bible are near 1700 Years old, the earliest many Ages older still: both Parts of it written in Languages, that have long been out of common Use; and the first in one, of which we have no other Remains approaching towards its Antiquity; and which therefore, were it ever so accurate and beautiful originally, is incapable of being perfectly understood at present. Now these Things, and, what must accompany them, a great Diversity of Customs, and Modes of speaking, from ours,

^a 1 Cor. ix. 22.

without defesting, or obstructing, the general Design of Scripture, must of Necessity obscure the Beauty, and even the Meaning, of particular Places; and prevent in some Measure its appearing to Us what it is in itself. The same is the Case of the ancient fine Writers among the Heathens. Yet none of Them was ever despised on that Account by Men of Judgement; but they are studied and illustrated, and their latent Excellencies pointed out with the greater Care; and perhaps the more admired, for being less obvious: and large Allowances are made for those Perfections, which must have been formerly visible, but are no longer so. Now surely we ought to judge of Scripture with equal Fairness and Regard.

Besides, as all ancient Books in the World have suffered more or less by the Negligence of Transcribers, and the Injuries of Time, yet without the Loss, or any considerable Diminution, of their Usefulness by it; so may the Bible. It is much better guarded against wilful Corruptions, and even casual Mistakes, in material Points, than any other old Record, by the vast Multitude of Copies, taken early, dispersed every where, read in public, weighed in private, quoted in Sermons, Conversations, Books, and remaining

remaining in the Hands of all different Sects of Christians, who would of Course watch one another to prevent any Attempts of making Alterations. Accordingly we find, and have great Cause to adore Providence for it, that neither during the long Reign of Popery hath any Text been changed, whatever may have been tried, to favour their Tenets, nor do the various Readings of the Manuscripts or Translations of any Church upon Earth, affect any single Fundamental of Faith or Practice. But still even small Errors in copying may have rendered Passages of less Moment, (for in these they would be likelier to escape Observation) defective, harsh, contrary to Grammar, inexplicable; may have broken Connexions, that once were plain; raised seeming Inconsistences, where at first there were none; but particularly may have altered Names, and increased or lessened Numbers, which in all Books are very apt to suffer by transcribing. And the various Disadvantages, under which any Parts of Scripture may be justly supposed to lie, from such Accidents as these, must in all Equity be charged, not on itself, but on the blameable Carelessness of Mankind. God was not obliged to work Miracles to prevent them: but we are obliged

S E R M O N III.

81

to honour duly whatever comes from him, though we cannot enjoy it in its original Perfection. Length of Time hath not diminished at all in any Thing essential, nor very considerably in any Thing else, the Usefulness of the sacred Writings: which, I hope, hath now been satisfactorily proved and vindicated.

But the Text asserts them, not only to be useful, but completely useful: *that, by their Means, the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*: the Minister of the Gospel fully provided with what he is to preach, the Believer with what he is to learn. I cannot enlarge on this Point, and surely I need not: for the Proof is short, and the Objections easily obviated without naming them. If the Scriptures are inspired, what they say of themselves is true; and they say they are sufficient to Salvation, plainly in the Text and elsewhere, and imply it throughout. The Old Testament was sufficient in its Time: how can we doubt, but the New is now? How can we imagine, that in a Volume of such Bulk written by different Persons all under the Direction of God, professedly for instructing Mankind in Religion, and containing so many Discourses of Christ and his Apostles for that Purpose, any

Thing necessary is omitted? Besides, we can know no more of Christianity with Certainty by any other Way, than we know by this. Oral Instruction would answer the End very well for a Time, and did so: and therefore St. *Paul* very properly directs the *Thessalonians* to hold the Traditions, which they had been taught, whether by Word, or by his Epistle¹. But Things, delivered by Word of Mouth only, are soon lost or changed; and false and mischievous Traditions rise up instead of the true; as the *Jewish* Church had then experienced: and therefore the Christian Covenant was put in Writing by the first Publishers of it, as the preceding was by *Moses*. The Christian Writers, who succeeded the Apostles, were confessedly fallible, and consequently unworthy of equal Regard with them: nor did they attempt to make any Additions to the Rule of Faith and Manners, comprehended in the Bible. On the contrary, they held, as we do, that all essential Articles are to be found there: and so did the following Ages too: till at Length the Rulers of the Church of *Rome*, having set up Notions and Practices, which the Scripture did not warrant, were obliged to pretend, (but very falsely)

¹ 2 Thess. ii. 15.

that they were taught by the ancient Fathers, or delivered down by Memory. And they decreed in the Council of *Trent*, 200 Years ago, that such Traditions were to be received with the same Respect, as holy Writ. But let Us rest on surer Ground: *build on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone*^{*}; and on all Occasions appeal to the Law and to the Testimony: for if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them¹.

^{*} Eph. ii. 20.

¹ 1C. viii. 20.

SE R M O N III

that they were taught by the ancient Fathers
or delivered down by Tradition. And they de-
clared in the Council of Paris, and Trent, and
that such Traditions were to be received with
the same Respect, as holy Writ. But let us
test on further Ground: Shall we be the less
of the Apostles and Apostles? John Calvin
testifying the early Councils, and on all
Occasions appeal to the Law and to the
Scriptures: for if they speak not according to the
Word, it is no more than a light in darkness.

1641

1641

may object what was written under to peculiar
a Dispensation of God, for our Guidance to eter-
nal Happiness, to what can we possibly ever be
bound to attend? And yet I fear the Conscience
of many it is not only a solemn duty, but a

S E R M O N IV.
us, how little we regard, how seldom we look
into these Books. We exclaim against it per-
haps as the weakness of Ignorance in the Church
of Rome, that it prohibits them to be read with-

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God;
and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof,
for Correction, for Instruction in Righteous-
ness; that the Man of God may be perfect,
thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.*

IN discoursing on these Words, I have already
proved

- I. That Scripture is of Divine Authority:
- II. That it completely answers every Purpose
of Religion.

And therefore I now proceed to the next
Head, proposed in the Beginning, which is

- III. That we ought to read and study it di-
ligently.

This Duty follows with the clearest Evidence,
from its Inspiration and Usefulness. For if we

may neglect what was written under so peculiar a Direction of God, for our Guidance to eternal Happiness, to what can we possibly ever be bound to attend? And yet I fear the Consciences of many, if not most of us, can too easily inform us, how little we regard, how seldom we look into, these Books. We exclaim against it perhaps as the wickedest Tyranny in the Church of *Rome*, that it prohibits them to be read without Licence. But do we ourselves make much more Use of our Bibles in the Midst of the fullest Liberty, than if they continued to be locked up from us? Do we not spend a very small Share of our Time, of our Leisure Time, in looking into Them, compared with what is wasted in the idlest Occupations and Amusements? The Hours, which we allot to reading, do we not more commonly, and with far more Pleasure, employ them on any other Sort of Reading, the most insignificant, the most corrupting and pernicious, than on this? Are there not Multitudes, who can hardly name the Time, when, even on the Lord's Day itself, they read a Chapter, with the serious Intention of improving their Souls? Nay, the few, (and very few I doubt they are at present,) who think of Religion in earnest, do they not usually apply to

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other

other Books chiefly for Instruction in it, and study the sacred Volumes far less, than the Compositions of fallible Men?

These are Facts as notorious, as they are lamentable. And therefore I shall

1. Consider, in order to remove, the Causes, from which so wonderful a Contempt of God's Word hath arisen.

2. Produce his Commands for paying it a very different Regard.

3. Shew, what Evils follow from disobeying these Commands.

1. I shall consider the Causes, from which this wonderful Contempt of God's Word hath arisen.

Now the more general Causes doubtless are, the original Corruption of our Nature, indisposing us to every Thing good; (against which, if we value our Interests in a future Life, we ought to watch continually:) and our consequent Acts and Habits of Sin, which we very absurdly suffer to drive us from the Scripture, that we may be easy in them, instead of having Recourse to the Scripture, which would excite us to an effectual Reformation of them. Another very extensive Cause is the wrong Education of our Youth. They are very little taught, in Com-

parison of what they should, (if they are taught at all) either by their Parents at Home, or their Masters or Tutors afterwards, to be reverently conversant in the sacred Writings, and yet less instructed how to profit by them. Hence they are unacquainted with their History, their Doctrines, their Language: have no early Impressions made on them in Favour of what they contain: and so, when they are grown up, ignorantly slight them, sin without any Restraint from them, and are easily induced to join with Scoffers in ridiculing them. All this might be much otherwise, if they, who educate Children, were but near so careful about it, as true Piety, or even common Prudence, would lead them to be.

Other Causes, or Excuses, for neglecting to read Scripture are, the various Objections made against it, many of which you have heard confuted; and the Disagreeableness arising from the Peculiarity of its Style, of which also I have spoken. But such as can read it only in a Translation, (and the rest are a very small Number in Proportion,) will be tempted to complain of it still more than others: whereas they ought to acknowledge, that they are less qualified to judge, and therefore less intitled to find Fault.

For all Translations, especially from Writings of distant Countries and Ages, lose a great deal of the Spirit, the Strength, the Elegance, and often the Clearness too, of the Original. Besides, ours is a literal Translation. Even the most figurative and poetical Passages, and the remotest from our whole common Manner of Expression, are almost always rendered Word for Word, without aiming at Beauty, but merely at Faithfulness. It is incredible, to any but Men of Skill in these Matters, how great a Disadvantage this must be. Scarce any other ancient Book could appear tolerable in such a Dress, but the Bible: and that suffers by it extremely. Yet if this Method had not been chosen, if any fine Passages had been brought into a fairer Light, any harsh ones softened, any dark ones explained, any Turn of a Sentence made more forcible or more pleasing, by taking only such Freedoms, in a moderate Degree, as are taken, to a very great one, in most or all other Authors, that we translate; the same Persons, who complain of Flatness or Obscurity now, would have complained of Artifice and Unfairness then. And surely the scrupulous Fidelity, which hath been shewn on this Occasion, well deserves in Return the Candor of
making

making all due Allowances. Amongst these, a very great one is to be made on the following Account, that even this Translation was published above 150 Years ago; when Multitudes of Texts were not near so well understood, and consequently could not be so rightly expressed, as they have been since: when also our Language was different, in several Particulars, from what it is at present; and therefore, though it hath been happily secured, by the common Use of our Bible and Prayer Book, from changing so fast as it did before, yet some Phrases in both are become less intelligible, and a great many less proper and graceful, than they once were: not to say, that the utmost Propriety and Accuracy was not in those Days very strictly regarded. Besides, every Book of the Bible hath, for the Convenience of Quotation, been divided, many Ages after it was written, into Chapters, not always quite so judiciously separated, as they might have been: and these Chapters again into very short Verses, which Persons are too apt to consider as independent Sentences; and thus often mistake the Meaning, but oftener still overlook the otherwise plain Connexion and Force of Argument in the sacred Writings: perhaps imagine that there is none,
and

and that studying them is to little Purpose. Nay lastly, the very Expositors of Scripture, whose Profession is to assist Men in reading it, and whose Utility for that Purpose, upon the whole, is very considerable, yet sometimes discourage them from it. For Commentators, in all Books on which they labour much, and therefore above all in the Bible, on which they have laboured most, frequently perplex what without them would be clear enough; either from Partiality to their own Notions, or Vanity of finding out something new, or Desire of seeming to differ from others where they do not, that they may not seem to copy them when they do.

All these Things contribute to lessen the Esteem of the Bible with some, perhaps more than is imagined: for though they may seldom be proposed as direct formal Arguments against its Usefulness, yet they are secretly and artfully thrown into the Scale, so as to weigh a great deal on that Side of the Question. And many, who will not allow, or, it may be, do not perceive, that they think the worse of Scripture for them, yet are kept by them, more or less, from the serious reading of it. But evidently both Sorts of Persons act very unreasonably.

For

For the Original is not in the least answerable for the Defects of Translations, or for any other human Imprudences. And though it cannot, by the best Translation, appear in all its primitive Splendor; yet in the worst (and ours is far from being such,) it exhibits every Thing necessary to the obtaining of eternal Life, which alone might sufficiently recommend it to our most reverent Respect and diligent Meditation. However, besides this, under its greatest Disadvantages, if we attend to it judiciously, we shall find in it, (as Critics, by no Means prejudiced in its Favour, have confessed) far nobler and more striking Beauties, and in far greater Plenty, than in any or all the Writers of Hea-then Antiquity.

But the internal Hindrances, (if I may call them so) of studying Scripture, have not been the only, or perhaps the chief ones. Others of strong Influence have proceeded from outward and accidental Circumstances. When restoring the Knowledge of it had overthrown the Dominion of Popery over this and several neighbouring Countries, (an Event, which ought to make it for ever dear to us,) the Spirit of Controversy, once raised on that Subject, was unnecessarily extended to so many others, that the

Word

Word of God came to be considered by too many in scarce any other Light than as furnishing Materials for Disputes; and so the following Generations began to grow weary of Them and It together. Another Misfortune was, that frequently Men, not the best qualified for interpreting even the plainer Parts of it, blinded with new Light, undertook without Fear the most difficult; and fathered upon the Bible whatever Absurdities had started up in their own Imaginations. Besides, not a few in the last Century, from an Affectation of uncommon Esteem for it, introduced its peculiar Phrases on Occasions of so little Dignity, grafted so freely still more peculiar ones upon them, and used both so improperly and unseasonably, that others, from Disgust of their Language, contracted no small Dislike to that of Scripture itself. Nay, I fear, that the sacred Writings have not had sufficient Justice done them even in the Pulpit. We are apter to dwell on general Subjects, than to explain particular Passages; and afraid to break the Force of a Reasoning or an Exhortation by intermixing with it the Exposition of a Text. In some Degree this may be right: but I doubt we carry it too far, especially as we have no separate expounding
ing

ing of Scripture, which discreetly conducted would be unspeakably useful. And thus the People have been left sadly ignorant of a great Part of their Bibles. Now these Things, coinciding in our Days with a higher Degree, than ever the World knew before, of that Self-Opinion, which despises the Doctrines of Revelation as irrational, and that Rage for Self-Indulgence of every Kind, which renders its Precepts and Threatenings insupportable, have produced an absolute Scorn of it in great Numbers, and a strange Indifference towards it in almost all. So that now mere Custom and Fashion is thought sufficient to justify, and even require, if we are well bred, a total and avowed Neglect of this important Book ; without spending a Moment on the disagreeable Examination, what Pleas it hath to urge for being studied as the Law of our Lives.

Yet visibly these Inducements for disregarding it, are, if possible, more groundless than the foregoing. Some have made wrong and absurd Uses of it. Why should that hinder Us from making the right and wise one? Some are conceited, or vicious, or fond of Applause from the weakest of their Fellow Creatures. Why should not We, notwithstanding that, be humble

ble and virtuous, and seek the Approbation of our Creator? Let us therefore determine, that neither bad Reasons nor bad Examples shall ever move us to slight the holy Scriptures: and carefully divesting ourselves of the Prejudices too commonly arising from them, let us proceed

2. To hear the divine Commands for reading and honouring it.

Every Manifestation of God's Will implies in its very Nature a Command to hearken to it with our deepest Attention: and his Words could be written down for no other End, than that all Persons concerned might peruse them frequently, and bear them always in Mind. But that none may pretend Ignorance of his Purpose, he hath declared it expressly. *Moses charges the Israelites: Behold I have taught you Statutes and Judgements, even as the Lord my God commanded me: take Heed to thyself, and keep thy Soul diligently, lest thou forget them, and they depart from thy Heart: but teach them thy Sons and thy Sons Sons, that they may learn to fear him all the Days that they shall live upon the Earth, and that they may teach their Children.* God himself charges them; *Lay up*

^a Deut. iv. 5, 9, 10.

these my Words in your Heart and in your Soul, and teach them your Children, that your Days may be multiplied, and the Days of your Children^b. He charges Joshua in particular: This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy Mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein Day and Night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then shalt thou make thy Way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good Success^c. The first Psalm saith the very same Thing of every pious Man: His Delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in his Law will he exercise himself Day and Night: and whatsoever he doth, it shall prosper^d. Nor are we to study the Precepts only, but the rest. Isaiah, speaking of the Completion of a Prophecy, directs the People: Seek ye out of the Book of the Lord, and read^e. When the rich Man in the Parable was desirous to prevent his Brethren from coming into the same Place of Torment with himself, Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets: let them hear Them^f. When the Jews were venting their Prejudices against our Saviour, he exhorts them: Search the Scriptures: for in Them ye think,

^b Deut. xi. 18, 19, 21. ^c Josh. i. 8. ^d Ps. i. 2, 4.
^e Is. xl. xiv. 16. ^f Luke xvi. 29.

meaning,

meaning, and rightly think, ye have eternal Life, and they are they, which testify of me¹. St. Paul tells the Romans, that *Whatsoever Things were written aforetime were written for our Learning*². Now we cannot question surely, but the New Testament deserves equal Attention with the Old. The Proof, which you have had, of its Inspiration, proves that at the same Time. The Gospels, written that Men might believe, and believing have Life³, must be read to produce that Effect. Of the Epistles we may judge, by the Care which St. Paul took to have His communicated and spread. He inscribes his first to the *Corinthians*, not to Them only, but to *all that in every Place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord*⁴. He requires the *Colossians*, when that which he addressed to them is read amongst them, to cause that it be read also in the Church of the *Laodiceans*⁵. He charges the *Thessalonians* by the Lord, in the first Epistle, which They had from him, that it be read unto all the holy Brethren⁶. Doubtless the other Churches too understood his Mind in this Matter. And St. John in the Beginning of the *Revelation*, a Book that seems

¹ John v. 39. ² Rom. xv. 4. ³ John xx. 31. ⁴ 1 Cor. i. 2. ⁵ Col. iv. 16. ⁶ 1 Thess. v. 27.

the least fitted of any for common Use, takes Care to say, *Blessed is He that readeth, and they that hear, the Words of this Prophecy*^a.

These excellent Men could not mean, that only the Christians of that Generation were bound to read their Writings. They knew the following ones would have the same and greater Need, in Proportion to their Distance. The following ones, for three Centuries and more, knew it themselves; employed their Thoughts on the sacred Books principally, carried them about in their Bosoms, gave up their Lives rather than part with them: and such as through Fear delivered them to their Persecutors to be destroyed, were censured by the Authority of the Church; and branded, in the common Speech of the Faithful, by the infamous Name of *Traditores*, from which the Word Traitor is derived into our Tongue.

In vain are we told then, that the Scriptures contain Passages *hard to be understood*, and therefore are not fit for vulgar Inspection. St. Peter, who said they did^b, made no such Inference. The primitive Christians, who experienced it as well as we, never thought nor heard of any such. In our Saviour's Conversation with his

^a Rev. i. 3.

^b 2 Pet. iii. 16.

Apostles there were Things, extremely hard to be understood : ought they then to have been debarred from it? Let us not aim to be wiser than God. He hath given us his Word, not for a Snare, but for a Light and a Guide. Every Blessing which we have, indeed, puts us to some Trial : and this tries our Fairness of Mind, our Diligence in collecting the Articles of our Faith and Practice, our Gratitude for what he bestows, our Submission to his good Pleasure in what he withholds from us. But he that hath engaged us in this Work, if we use our faithful Endeavours humbly, will not fail to support us under the Difficulties of it; and the going through it as we ought will be suitably rewarded. Were the pretended Dangers therefore, in the Study of Scripture, much greater than they are, yet this is the Method, which God hath appointed for our spiritual Improvement; and which having appointed, he will render effectual. Let us trust him therefore to instruct us in his own Way. By the reading and preaching of his Word, however unpromising the Means might seem, he raised up his Church at first, notwithstanding all the Violence of *Jews* and *Heathens*: and by the same he will uphold it for ever, against all the Scoffs and Cavils of Infidels. For

the Foolishness of God is wiser than Men: and the Weakness of God is stronger than Men. Our only Concern is to perform the Duty, which he hath commanded: and we shall certainly receive the Benefits, which he hath promised, each in the Manner and Degree, that his Case requires.

But as you have already seen the Profitableness of Scripture to every Purpose of Religion, you have seen by Consequence the Advantages of being conversant in it: and therefore I shall now go on to invert the Prospect, by shewing you, as I proposed,

3. The Evils, which follow from disregarding the Injunctions of God in Relation to it.

Were those Injunctions in themselves of no great Moment, yet they come from the Almighty: and refusing to take Notice of them is losing the Recompense of so much Obedience, and incurring the Penalty of so much Disobedience. But they are indeed of Moment unspeakable, in several Respects. The sacred Writings are the Source of our religious Knowledge: and without an Acquaintance with them, we shall be liable to Ignorance, Uncertainty and Mistake, even in Points of the greatest Import-

1 Cor. i. 25.

ance. Thence arose the false Doctrine of the *Sadducees*, to whom our Saviour says, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures* *. Nor is the Danger less in Respect of Practice. Neglect of holy Writ must introduce a Neglect of its Author, on more Accounts than one. How shall Persons keep themselves easy in not looking into a Book, which their Maker hath appointed to be written for their Use, and required them to use continually, but by thinking as little and as lowly of him as they can? Therefore they will be strongly tempted to every Thing, that may assist them in such Impiety: and will soon, alas, find themselves able to make large Advances in that high Road to Ruin here and hereafter. Again, Scripture places before Men, in every Page, the most affecting Proofs and Descriptions of the Holiness and Justice, the Wisdom and Power, the Goodness and Mercy, the continual Presence and never ceasing Agency of Him, who is the Creator, the Benefactor, the King and Judge of all. It makes known to us the inexpressible Condescension and Love of our Redeemer, the perfect Reasonableness and Purity of his Law, the Need and Means of obtaining the sanctifying Influences of the blessed

* Matt. xxii. 29.

Spirit, the infinite Importance of preparing for our unchangeable State. If then, for Want of attending to Scripture, the Impressions of these Objects wear out of our Minds, as they must; all the Seriousness, which they are fitted to produce, will wear out of them at the same Time; spiritual and eternal Things will be less and less in our Thoughts, (consult your own Hearts, I intreat you, whether you do not find it so) till at last we shall come to live and act as *without God in the World* *. Particularly, what we are bound to do and abstain from is laid down in the Bible much too clearly to be misunderstood or evaded. But if once we leave off looking for our Duty there, we shall soon mould it within our own Minds into what Shape and Size we please, till we bring it in Effect to nothing. For even supposing, that we begin our Neglect with no such Intention at all, yet bad Inclinations will creep in upon us, one after another, and not meeting with the proper Check, will increase and multiply, we cannot easily suspect beforehand to what Degree.

It will be said perhaps, that reading other good Books, which are shorter and clearer, may supply the Omission of reading Scripture, possi-

* Eph. ii. 12.

bly on the whole to Advantage. But they, who once grow weary of the latter, seldom, I believe, continue long to make any considerable Use of the former: and therefore this Plea, for the most Part, is only a Pretence. Or were it sincere, as unquestionably it sometimes is, other Books have not, and cannot have, the Authority in what they affirm, in what they require, in what they promise and threaten, that the Word of God hath: *the Word*, which our Saviour hath declared *shall judge us in the last Day*. Joined with this, and confirmed by it, the Compositions of Men are of great Efficacy: but when they are separated from it, the Case is unspeakably altered. We shall be apt to pay as little Regard, as we think fit, to mere human Writers: and overlook, or call in Question, whatever we do not like. Yet sometimes again we shall be in Danger of paying them too much Regard, and so being led by them into false Notions, which may give us Uneasiness without Need, or Comfort without Ground; or into superstitious Practices, which may discredit our holy Profession. What followed in the middle Ages of Christianity when Men left off and were discouraged from reading the Word

* John xii. 48.

of Truth, but that they were *turned unto Fables*? Lying Legends were believed: Pictures and Images were first gazed at for Instruction, then worshipped. They *forsook the Fountain of living Waters, and bewood them out broken Cisterns, that held no Water*; but Draughts of Poison: whereas what we learn in Scripture, we learn from the Spring-Head; and not only every Thing it teaches is right, but its very Silence is instructive. For if any Thing is not made there a necessary Part of our Faith or Practice, no Power on Earth hath a Right to make it so: and had but Believers invariably kept to this Book, as their Rule; all the Corruptions of Christianity, and all the Wickedness of every Kind, produced by those Corruptions, had been happily prevented. Besides, were we to embrace every Thing right, and nothing wrong, that we find in other pious Treatises; yet there is a peculiat Energy in holy Writ, which is not in Them. Its Denunciations are more awful, its Convictions stronger, its Consolations more authentic, its Warnings more alarming, its Exhortations more penetrating. The bare Reflection, who it is that speaks, cannot fail to make them so in a very considerable Degree:

* 2 Tim. iv. 4. * Jer. ii. 13.

and

and he hath added a supernatural Force to them over and above. *Is not my Word like as a Fire, saith the Lord, and like a Hammer that breaketh the Rock in Pieces?* The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart*. Whence accordingly the efficacious and converting Preacher, is He, not who comes with enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but who, like Apollos, is mighty in the Scriptures. He that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully: what is the Chaff to the Wheat? saith the Lord†.

But farther: By omitting to read and consider the original Charter of our Religion, from which our whole Knowledge of it is derived, Persons will be unacquainted with the Language of Religion. And hence they will first blindly stumble and cavil at the Phrases of Scripture, not knowing them to be such: and afterwards learn to despise them, though they do know it. The Offices of the Liturgy, especially the occasional ones, that recur seldom, will seem

* Jer. xxiii. 29.

† Heb. iv. 12.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 4.

§ Acts xviii. 24.

¶ Jer. xxiii. 28.

strange and unaccountable to them. They will repeat the Psalms in the Congregation absolutely without meaning; neither saying in their own Persons, or applying to their own Use, the Things that suit them; nor thinking at all, to what Sort of Persons, or good Purposes, the rest relates. They will hardly ever pay Attention to the Lessons, Epistles and Gospels, but look upon them as Pauses and Breaks in the Service, to be filled up as they please; or if they do hearken to them, yet not understanding many Parts of them, will receive little Benefit from them; and possibly misunderstanding some, will receive Harm: entertaining injurious Opinions of the sacred Oracles from what they hear out of them, in this imperfect Manner, instead of the honourable and useful Sentiments, which would have been revived in their Breasts, had they applied themselves beforehand to an orderly Perusal of them with proper Care. . . Then as to Sermons, on which commonly the chief Reliance for Instruction is, they, who are not sufficiently versed in the Bible at Home, will be unable to judge of the Proofs we bring from it here, or the general Conformity of our Preaching to it. And elsewhere they will be misled by the Sound of scriptural Words, used in a

Sense

Sense which the Writers never intended; and so be like *Children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Sleight of Men and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*^b. Now it is not our Desire to impose on your Ignorance, but to appeal to your Knowledge. We wish, we beseech you, to imitate the *Bereans*, commended so justly in the *Acts of the Apostles*, as more noble than those in *Thessalonica*, in that they received the Word with all Readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those Things were so. It follows, *Therefore many of them believed*^c; effectually no Doubt.

Another very important Use of searching the Scripture is, that in the Midst of that Deluge of evil Communication, which overflows this wicked Land, to a Degree that no Country, calling itself Christian, ever experienced before, few Persons can avoid hearing, more or less, unfair and even ludicrous Representations made of one Part or other of God's Word; which may be too likely to pass upon them for just ones, unless they are previously so well skilled in it, as either to know in particular the true Vindication of the Passages abused, or at least

^b Eph. iv. 14.^c Acts xvii. 11, 12.

to know in general, that it cannot be liable to the Imputations, which profane People would cast upon it, because the Spirit of the whole is inconsistent with their Suggestions. If indeed they themselves would but take the Trouble of understanding what they take the Liberty of burlesquing, it would save them the Guilt of many a blasphemous Reflection, and the Shame of many a silly Jest. But at least Persons of better Dispositions will surely be persuaded to so rational a Method of guarding against the Infection of their pernicious Irreverence. Possibly some will reply, that irreligious Thoughts and Temptations to Unbelief may arise from what occurs to us in reading the Bible ourselves, as well as from what others occasionally say of it. But certainly the Danger is far less: and the greatest Part of that may be prevented by observing such Rules for the safe and useful Performance of this Duty, as Persons, one should imagine, would of Course lay down for themselves, or at least will see to be reasonable, when proposed to them; as, God willing, they shall be to you the very next Opportunity. And if still any Difficulty and Trial remain, yet coming in our Way, when our Minds are in a serious and considerate State, disposed to
examine

examine impartially and reverently, as in the Presence of God, and to beg, that his Spirit would guide us into all Truth; there will be no Doubt of obtaining, on due Inquiry, competent Satisfaction.

I shall only say this farther, to shew the Evil of neglecting the sacred Writings, that They are what makes us to differ from the Gentiles, which know not God; for even our natural Religion is borrowed from them; and they can be useful only by being read: that when the Church of Rome had almost suppressed them, Christianity was buried under Falsehood, Superstition and Wickedness; and when they were restored to common Use, true Piety, Virtue and Liberty, were restored by their Means: that those Nations and those Persons, who attend to them with the highest Respect, are the most sincerely, the most steadily good: and that in Proportion as We of this Nation have disregarded them, we have grown unsettled in our Faith even of what Reason teaches, profligate in our Behaviour, unmindful of public or private real Welfare, and visibly ripe for speedy Destruction.

^a John xvi. 13.

^e 1 Thess. iv. 5.

Let

Let us all therefore instantly return to the right Way, before it is too late. The poorest of us, if he hath not a Bible, may have one, either by Purchase, for he lays out much more in a few Weeks on Matters of far less Necessity, or by the charitable Gift of some pious Benefactor. And the busiest of us may and must find Time for every Branch of the *one Thing needful*^f. Every Person hath at least several Hours of the Lord's Day, and some little Share of others, for the Exercises of Religion: But many of us have much more Leisure; not all of it perhaps innocently, and a great deal of it not prudently, employed. Spending a due Part of it on the divine Law would both dispose and enable us to spend the rest, whether devoted to worldly Affairs or to Relaxations, with truer Cheerfulness now, and to a better Account at the great Day. We have most of us at Times heavy Sufferings: and poor Supports are any others, that we can use under them, compared with theirs, who *by Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures have Hope*^g. The most cautious of us have frequently violent Assaults from our spiritual Enemy: and we cannot arm ourselves against him more effectually,

^f Luke x. 42.^g Rom. xv. 4.

than, as our Lord himself did, with *the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*^a. The strongest of us have sad Remains of Weakness, the discreetest of Injudiciousness: and the surest Remedy for both is that of the Son of *Sirach*: *Let thy Mind be upon the Ordinances of the Lord, and meditate continually in his Commandments: He shall establish thine Heart, and give thee Wisdom at thine own Desire*ⁱ.

^a Eph. vi. 17.ⁱ Ecclus. vi. 37.

S E R M O N V.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

*All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God :
and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for
Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness :
that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly
furnished unto all good Works.*

I HAVE shewn you, in several Discourses
on this Text, the Divine Authority of
Scripture, its complete Usefulness to all the
Purposes of Religion, and the consequent Duty
of reading it. Yet still I am sensible an un-
happy Objection may remain with too many,
that they have tried, and do not experience this
Usefulness; and why it should be their Duty
to persist in reading what they do not find at-
tended with any good Effects, they cannot ap-
prehend. But if they have not read as they

ought, their whole Argument falls to the Ground. Nothing is to be expected from the wrong Performance of any Duty : and therefore I proposed originally

IV. To give Directions for the right Performance of this.

Many proper ones, I hope, have been intimated to you not obscurely, under the former Heads : Part of which however I shall now repeat amongst others. For to say again *the same Things, to me is not grievous, and for you it is safe*.*

That we should come to the Word of God with serious Minds, is a Requisite, that one should hardly have thought needful to mention, if there were not some, who give little other Proof of ever having looked into it, than perverting the Expressions of it to ludicrous Purposes, and so extracting Poison from the Bread of Life. You need not be told, that such can receive no Improvement from it : but only be warned against suffering them to infect you with the same Distemper : for to Men of a gay and lively Turn it is often very catching. But reflect : Every Book in the World, of every Sort, may easily be turned into Matter of Di-

* Phil. iii. 1.

version, if People are resolved to shew at any Rate, some their Ability, and others, (which is far the more usual Case) their Desire only, of being witty. But especially on sacred Subjects, the Corruptness of Mens Hearts disposes them both to invent and receive such Kind of Entertainment with peculiar Eagerness: for this very Reason principally, that they know they ought not. And besides, the Old and New Testament do lie somewhat opener to profane Abuse, than many other pious Compositions, from the Difference of Stile and Manners in distant Ages and Countries, from the scrupulous Exactness of our Translation, and the Changes in our Language, that have happened since it was made. But surely there are strong Motives, of Religion, of Prudence, of common Decency, to restrain Men, from taking such unfair Advantages, to so bad an End; if this contemptible Affectation of appearing ingenious, by forcing a Laugh out of every Thing, did not so effectually destroy, as it doth, all Regard to Rightness of Behaviour and true good Sense. *A Scornor seeketh Wisdom, and findeth it not: but Knowledge is easy to him, that considereth^b.*

^b Prov. xiv. 6. It is wrongly translated, *understandeth*.

Let us therefore never permit ourselves to make, either in Thought, at the Time of reading the Scripture, or in Discourse afterwards, a light and burlesque Application of any Text: for how little Harm soever we may intend, the Practice is plainly unfit and irreverent: besides that we are soon led on from small Freedoms to greater. And let us never be influenced to think ill or meanly of the least Part of God's Word from any such Applications made by others: for they prove nothing against Scripture, but much against those who invent or use them. Or if we find, that, notwithstanding, they do in Fact begin to make Impressions upon us, as they may imperceptibly, if we are not on the Watch; let us avoid, as carefully, yet as inoffensively, as we can, the Company of those, who delight in such dangerous Conversation: according to Solomon's excellent Rule, *Cease, my Son, to hear the Instruction, that causeth to err from the Words of Knowledge*. For as to any Hope of Good from arguing with them, no People upon Earth are so incapable of being convinced or silenced by Reason, as they that are conceited of a libertine Wit. And therefore, however entertaining their Talk may be

^c Prov. xix. 27.

otherwise,

otherwise, yet being essentially faulty in this Respect, let us consider it only in the strong, but just Light, in which St. Paul places the idle Discourse of some in his own Days, when he saith, *But shun profane and vain Babblings: for they will increase unto more Ungodliness; and their Word will eat, as doth a Canker*^d. They, whose Learning and Judgement and Taste and Worth are the most universally acknowledged, have, in all Times down to our own, spoken and thought of the Bible with the highest Degree of honourable Regard. And it is no less absurd, than impious, to be hurried into despising and ridiculing it, either by the extravagant Flights of any Man's wild Fancy, or the graver Authority of Judges so evidently prejudiced, as the self-sufficient, or the dissolute, merely because they are grown of late more numerous and less modest. Let us at least observe a little first, what good Effects this new Kind of Wisdom produces in the Lives and Families of those, who are so fond of it; and wait a while to see, (if indeed it be not too visible already,) what Sort of Figure they themselves, and a Nation composed of them, or led by them, make and

^d 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

are likely to make in the Eyes of the present and future Ages.

With due Seriousness we are to join due Reverence in reading Scripture: and *receive it, not as the Word of Men, but, as it is in Truth, the Word of God*^{*}; and therefore credible. The Revelation, which he hath given us, cannot indeed contradict the Reason, which he hath given us: and therefore we must never construe it irrationally. But it may easily contradict our fanciful Notions and favourite Conjectures: in which Case we are to *cast down Imaginations and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ*[†].

Nor is it less our Duty to subject all our vicious Inclinations to the Authority of holy Writ, than our vain Prejudices. For if we indulge but one, it will naturally bias us to reject, or misinterpret, whatever is inconsistent with it: and besides, we shall lose the Hope of that Illumination, without which we can apprehend nothing to good Purpose. Whence the Angel saith to Daniel, *None of the Wicked shall understand; but the Wise shall understand*[‡]. And our Saviour promises only[§], that *If any Man will*

^{*} 1 Theff. ii. 13.
[†] John vii. 17.

[‡] 2 Cor. x. 5.

[§] Dan. xii. 10.

do the Will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.

But with whatever good Dispositions we may read the Scripture, unless we read it also attentively, we shall fail of our End. If we perform it only as a Task, we shall find it a wearisome one. If we consider spending so much Time in it, without Care to improve by it, as a Work acceptable to God on its own Account: this is cheating ourselves with a false and superstitious Notion of Piety: and much more so, if we imagine, that employing one Part of the Day thus will in the least atone for doing, in any other Part, what we are forbidden.

Now attentive Reading will present to our View a Variety of Things, that will affect us very differently. And the Benefit or the Harm we shall receive from them, (for we may receive either,) will greatly depend on the Conduct, which we observe amidst them. If we have never been used to read the Bible, or have long disused it; some Passages in it will probably seem very strange to us at first: as undoubtedly the whole Frame of Nature, and the whole Tenor of Providence would seem, were we let into our present Knowledge of it all at once, instead of being made acquainted with it by slow

Degrees. They therefore, who come with a Disposition to object and cavil, may have abundant Room to exercise it. They, who insist on being satisfied in all Particulars, will be greatly disappointed in many. For everyone must not hope to discover whatever may be discovered; Or if he could, most of our Inquiries into the Scheme of Religion, revealed or natural, as well as into the Constitution of the material World, if pursued to the utmost, will at Length terminate in something which we do not and cannot know. So that Men must prepare themselves for what they will be sure to meet with; must expect to find some dark, and some hard Sayings. On these they must never put a bad Sense; but are neither to be offended at all, nor wonder much, if sometimes they are at a Loss how to put any: but believe implicitly, (for this is Faith in God, not Man,) that there is some, worthy of the rest: and not think of forsaking their Guide to Heaven, merely because they perceive not the Design or Propriety of every Sentence, that he speaks to them on the Road. In short, they must reason and resolve, if Need be, like the holy Apostles in the sixth of St. *John*: who were doubtless perplexed and staggered not a little at our Saviour's Discourse, recorded there; but when *many of his Disciples*
went

went back upon it, and walked no more with him, and Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life¹.

Persons thus rightly disposed will immediately see farther, that as they are not to be disgusted with Scripture, because they cannot account for every Thing, or understand every Thing, to their Wish; so neither are they to study it merely to understand as much of it as they can, which is only indulging an unedifying Curiosity; and yet less, to understand more of it than others, which is nursing up Vanity, and may tempt them to invent new and even dangerous Meanings, in order to seem more knowing than they are. But their Business is, to apply to those Points first, and dwell on those most, which have the closest Connexion with their future Happiness: for They are necessary; the rest are only, in their several Degrees, useful. And as right Practice is the End of Faith; and the firmest and most explicit Faith, which doth not produce it, is nothing; and a weak and general Faith, which doth produce it, will be accepted: the practical Passa-

¹ John vi. 66, 67, 68.

ges ought certainly to have our principal Regard; ever comprehending those, which express the Obligations of Christian Piety and moral Self-government, as well as Justice and Mercy. We shall indeed do very well, besides occasional Readings of particular Chapters, to peruse both Testaments in their Order: only it will be advisable to begin with, and go oftenest through, the New; as exhibiting what we are to believe and to do, more fully, and without such a Mixture, as there is in the Old, of Things belonging solely to the former Dispensation. But then the Regularity of this Course ought not to hinder us from selecting chiefly, and perusing most frequently, such Passages of both, as lay before us, in the most influencing Manner, the common Doctrines and common Duties of our holy Profession. Other Things may with Safety be lightly passed over, and imperfectly or not at all understood, till we are first well settled in these: which very happily are the plainer Parts of Scripture, as well as the more important.

Still even in Respect of these, and much more therefore of others, it is requisite, that we proceed with some Judgement and Care: that we make Use of the same Rules for understanding our Bibles, which we do for understanding

standing other Books; and such also, as the peculiar Nature of this Book points out: that we never interpret any Text in a Sense contrary to the Dictates of Reason, or to other Texts more clear or more numerous, or to the visible Design and Drift of the whole Passage: that we keep always in our View what goes before and follows after; for the Connexion is often very strong, where it is not extremely obvious: that we suppose not every Verse to be a separate Sentence of itself; nor every Chapter to have a separate Subject, that begins and ends with it; for these Divisions are intirely human, and sometimes not discreetly made; but that we read on without stopping, as far, and no farther, than the same Matter appears to be continued: and, (which is a Direction of great Moment) that we apply the Sayings of the holy Penmen, only to the Things of which they are treating, not to others, which perhaps were far from their Thoughts; unless a just Argument can be drawn from the former to the latter. We should also be careful to take both single Words, and Phrases comprehending several, not always in the Meaning which they bear in our daily Conversation, but in such as other Places of Scripture require or permit: understanding them literally where we can, but figuratively where
we

we must : should make such Abatements from strong Expressions, such Restrictions and Exceptions to general Expressions, and such Allowances for the whole Manner of speaking, as we perceive the Nature of the Thing, together with the Usage and Custom of the sacred Writers, demands. Without such Equity as this, in some Degree, one half of the Compositions, that appear in the World, would be Heaps of Absurdity. And if the Bible needs more of it, than later Books of nearer Countries, it also deserves it infinitely better : and refusing it is both Perverseness and Impiety. These easy Cautions will enable Persons of almost the lowest Capacity and Improvements, that either can read Scripture, or have the Means of hearing it read, to acquire so competent a Knowledge of what is most needful to be known, as will fully justify the Psalmist's Encomium, that *the Testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the Simple**.

Not that even the Learned, and much less the Illiterate, act either with Humility or Prudence, if in reading holy Writ they rely wholly on their own Judgement unassisted. For God hath made the Help of others extremely necessary to our Understanding of his Word, as

* Ps. xix. 7.

well as his Works. Men of great Abilities and Attainments, by trusting to themselves, have gone sadly wrong: and Men of no other Advantages, than a teachable Disposition, have arrived at a most beneficial Acquaintance with religious Truths. For God *hides Things from the Wise and Prudent* in their own Opinion, which he *reveals unto Babes*: *resisteth the Proud, but giveth Grace unto the Humble*^m. Nor let it be imagined, that such must therefore depend altogether in every Thing on the Authority of their spiritual Guides. For as in Matters of Science, or common Business, what a Man doth not see of himself, he may have shewn him notwithstanding, and then see it as truly and fully, as if it had been his own original Discovery: so in Matters of Revelation, one, who would otherwise have made small Progress, or, it may be, great Mistakes, yet having the main Articles of it methodically explained to him, in Discourses on his Catechism, and occasionally inculcated in Sermons, or Answers to the Questions which he asks in private, may, by comparing what he is thus taught, with what he reads in his Bible, come by Degrees, not to believe implicitly, but to discern

^l Matt. xi. 25, Luke x. 21.^m James iv. 6.

evidently, the genuine Sense of its fundamental Doctrines and Precepts. In which Case, his Faith rests no longer on the Word of Man, but that of God, whether we can answer all the specious Objections against it or not : which few People can do in any Thing that they believe of any Kind. We should therefore conscientiously take all fit Opportunities of learning Instruction from those, who are set apart to give it. For the *Priest's Lips* are appointed to *keep Knowledge*; and the People to *seek the Law at his Mouth*^a : not with a blind Submission to whatever he shall affirm; but with so much Regard at least, as in other Professions the more ignorant pay to the more skilful. Nor are we confined to respect only the Sentiments of the particular Teachers, whom we statedly attend, but ought to have much greater Deference for the general Persuasion of Christ's Church, particularly our own Branch of it, and a proportionable one for that of every knowing and good Person; always entertaining some Distrust of ourselves, when we differ from these. The Exercise of our best Judgment, and a modest Attention to that of others, are the joint Means, which our Maker hath

^a Mal. ii. 7.

instituted for the Understanding of his Will, natural and revealed. They, who use them uprightly, and they alone, may hope for Pardon of their Ignorance and Errors. And were any one to continue so ignorant to the last, as to believe the Truths contained in holy Writ, only because those about him told him they were such: yet might he have the Happiness of acquiring even by the Means of this most implicit Faith, Dispositions of Piety and Virtue unattainable otherwise, and sufficient to qualify him for eternal Happiness.

But sometimes Christians of a deeper Insight, real or imaginary, into Scripture, instead of complaining, like others, that necessary Doctrines and Precepts are not clear enough there, are tempted to think them expressed so much more familiarly, and repeated so much oftener than needed, that the Places, in which they are inculcated thus, may be passed over, as not designed for such, as They are. Now would they but consider even the least entertaining of them for a competent Time, with a Spirit of Seriousness, there would start out of them Information or Admonition, of which they little think, and for which they have great Occasion. Or should they find nothing that is new to them,
they

they would at least have Cause given them to recollect with humble Thankfulness, not only that their Christian Brethren do, and *are made wise unto Salvation* * by these despised plain Passages, and by these only, but that from Them, above the rest, proceeded all that Knowledge of the Redemption of Man, and almost all that Knowledge of natural Religion also, which the most learned enjoy; and which hath made even the vulgar of the Gospel Dispensation superior to the ablest and best instructed amongst the Heathen: a Superiority, which will be lost again, in Proportion as Regard to the Word of God decays.

But though, in reading it, we must all begin with attending, and ever after attend chiefly, to the first Elements of Christian Instruction, or, to speak in St. Peter's Language, *as new born Babes desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby* †; and know it for a bad Sign, if we cannot relish the Food of simplest Taste, and easiest Digestion: yet keeping to this wholly is the Business of those alone, who, as the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it, *are unskilful, or rather, unexperienced, in the Word of Righteousness*; which hath in it

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

† 1 Pet. ii. 2.

also strong Meat, belonging to them that are of full Age, who, by Reason of Use, have their Senses exercised to discern both Good and Evil.

We shall thrive best by the Use of lighter Nourishment first: and mixing the more solid with it prematurely may both check our Growth, and hurt our Health. But when we have acquired a due Firmness and Vigour, we shall both preserve and increase it, by feeding on other Things likewise, throughout the Scripture: the several Parts of which I shall briefly go over once again for your completer Direction.

The Historical Books of the Old Testament may be read carelessly with as little Improvement, as any other History. But therefore to prevent this, we are to reflect as we go along: and observe, according to the Nature of each Article, how it sets before us the Sovereignty, the Superintendency, the Wisdom, the Justice, the Mercy of God; the Amiability and Rewards of good Actions, the Deformity and Punishment of wicked ones; the Heights of Piety and Virtue, at which the Saints of old Time arrived, as We may by imitating them; the dreadful Sins into which they sometimes fell,

Heb. v. 13, 14.

as we shall, if we take not Warning. For *all these Things happened to Them for Ensamples; and they are written for our Admonition**. As to the Danger, which may arise from the bad Deeds of good Persons, related without Censure, and Actions that seem unwarrantable, yet are told with Approbation, and were therefore either done by God's extraordinary Commission, or grounded on Circumstances, of which we are not well apprized: I have spoken of these in a former Discourse; and shewn you, that, in such Circumstances, the Precepts, not the Histories of the Bible, must be our Rule.

In the Book of *Job*, some Parts are highly poetical, and proportionably dark: for which Reason our Attention must be chiefly paid to those others, which will amply recompense it, by exhibiting the noblest and most pleasing Views of the Majesty of the Almighty, of the patriarchal Religion, of the exquisite Beauties of Humanity and Charity, of the hard Struggle of human Virtue with heavy Afflictions, and God's gracious Acceptance of imperfect Endeavours. *Ye have heard of the Patience of Job: and have seen the End of the Lord; that he is very pitiful, and of tender Mercy**.

* 1 Cor. x. 11.

* James v. 11.

As to the *Psalms*: I have already explained to you the Nature of those, which contain Imprecations. Of repeating them all in the Church, I shall, God willing, speak some other Time. Of reading them in private, I need only say, that with the Exercise of but a common Degree of Judgement, every pious Person will find it equally improving and delightful.

The *Proverbs* have scarce any Obscurity, and much Use. Concerning *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Solomon*, you have had, I hope, sufficient Instructions for perusing them with Benefit.

The Prophetical Writings abound in difficult Passages; but still more in plain ones, expressing the sublimest Notions of Piety and Morals, the strongest Preference of inward Goodness to outward Observances, the awfulest Denunciations against Wickedness of every Kind, the most affectionate Expostulations, the most inviting Promises, the warmest and justest Concern for public Good: which the Prophets manifested with so fearless and impartial a Freedom, in telling both the Body of the People, and the highest in Authority; their Duty and their Sins, that the Descendants of those, who persecuted them when living, held their Memories, when dead, in eternal Honour; doubly

convinced of their Mission from Heaven, by the Accomplishment of their Predictions, and the singular Worthiness of their Conduct. In reading them therefore we must diligently attend to these interesting Points, each in its proper Place: observing also, along with them, the gradual Unfolding of the great Scheme of our Redemption; to which *we shall do well, even in these Days of opener Vision**, to take Heed, as to a *Light shining in a dark Place*†; especially as it confirms to us, that *known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning*‡. Such Passages in their Books, as relate to the Affairs of distant heathen Countries in Ages long ago past, though of admirable Use then, and not a little still as Parallels, we are neither likely nor concerned to understand fully. And such as belong to Things yet future, especially to the Times and Circumstances of those Things, are few, if any, of them fit for the Unlearned to pry into particularly. Nay, the Learned themselves, if they are prudent also, will observe, what Answer the Angel gave to the Prophet Daniel. *And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the End of these Things? And he said, Go thy Way, Da-*

* 1 Sam. iii. 1.

† 2 Pet. i. 19.

‡ Acts xv. 18.

*niel: for the Words are closed up, and sealed till the Time of the End*¹. When the proper Season comes, possibly in some Cases not before the Event hath interpreted them, the Prophecies will prove their own Reality by their Clearness; and strengthen, perhaps in an Hour of much Need, *the Faith and Patience of the Saints*²: Thus it happened to the Apostles. They understood not beforehand our Saviour's Prediction, *Destroy this Temple, and in three Days I will raise it up*. But when he was risen from the Dead, they remembered, that he had said this unto them: and they believed the Scripture, and the Word which Jesus had said³.

But almost the whole of the *Gospels* is now so clear, and both the Character and the Precepts of our blessed Lord appear in them so truly divine; the Zeal and Charity of the first Disciples in the *Acts* is so highly edifying, the Spirit of the *Epistles* so genuinely Christian, and their practical Rules are so completely instructive to all Sorts of Persons; that scarce any other Direction can be wanted for the Main of the New Testament, than to meditate on it continually. Some of the argumentative and occasional Parts of St. Paul's Writings indeed

¹ Dan. xii. 8, 9. ² Rev. xiii. 10. ³ John ii. 19, 22.

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¹ Dan. xii. 8, 9. ² Rev. xiii. 10. ³ John ii. 19, 22.

it is not easy to comprehend. A yet larger Proportion of the *Revelation of St. John* is exceedingly myſterious. But nothing of this Kind, in any Part of Scripture, needs either to diſcourage, or miſlead us. Not to diſcourage us; for whatever is requiſite to be underſtood, if it be put in one Place obſcurely, is doubtleſs put in ſome other plainly: nor to miſlead us, becauſe we may prudently ſuſpend our Judgment, and modeſtly be content with our Ignorance of what is intended, though fully ſatiſfied of its being a valuable Truth. *Seek not out, ſaith the Son of Sirach, the Things that are too hard for thee, neither ſearch the Things that are above thy Strength: But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with Reverence: for it is not needful for thee to ſee with thine Eyes the Things that are in ſecret. Be not curious in unneceſſary Matters: for more Things are ſhewed unto thee, than Men underſtand*^b.

Yet we are not to omit reading the abſtruſer Texts, which have any Appearance of relating to us: but follow the Example of the bleſſed Virgin, who *underſtood not ſeveral of our Saviour's Sayings, yet kept them all in her Heart*^c. Were we only to learn Humility thus, it would

^b Eccluſ. iii. 21, 22, 23.

^c Luke ii. 50, 51.

be enough; but we shall come by Degrees to apprehend far more than we expected, if we diligently *compare spiritual Things with spiritual*^a; darker Expressions with clearer, that are like or opposite to them: for Contraries illustrate one another. In this laudable Work, the marginal References in the later Editions of the Bible will afford you most useful Assistance: for they are very judiciously chosen. Such Information also as you can get, (and you may get much from several Books,) of the Nature of the Language of each Testament, and the History and Notions of the Times, when each Book of it was written, will be extremely profitable: and the several excellent Commentaries and Paraphrases on the whole, or particular Parts of it, still more: which therefore it is wonderful that so few Christians in Proportion, of those who are well able, will be at the Expence of purchasing for themselves; especially considering how very much greater Expences, that will turn either to no Account or a bad one, they so little grudge, that they cannot be restrained from them.

But how successfully soever we may increase our Knowledge of Scripture, that alone is no-

^a 1 Cor. ii. 13.

thing. We must not think we have done with a Passage as soon as we have understood it. If we had understood it instantly, our principal Work was to come yet: and they are strangely wrong, who apply so closely to study difficult Places, that they forget to make due Reflections on the plain. The Word of God was written to give us, not merely a speculative Apprehension, but an experimental Sense and Feeling of holy Things, comfortable or terrifying, as our spiritual State requires. *I rejoice at thy Word, as one that findeth great Spoil, saith the Psalmist^{*}. To this Man will I look, saith the Lord, even to Him that is poor and of a contrite Spirit, and that trembleth at my Word[†].* Too many, alas, have no Conception of this Efficacy in Scripture: and no Wonder, for they have never seriously endeavoured to have any. But let them try in Earnest, and they will infallibly succeed, if they use proper Means. We read of some, what will be true of all in the same Condition, that *the Word did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith[‡].* God indeed can operate according to his own Pleasure: but humanly speaking, Persons will not be influenced by what they disbelieve; or much, by what they believe but

^{*} Ps. cxix. 162.

[†] Is. lxvi. 2.

[‡] Heb. iv. 2.

faintly.

faintly. Nay should they labour to make the strongest Impressions on their own Souls, without applying to Him, whose *Gift saving Faith* is^h, their Efforts would be vain. But let any one jointly strive and pray for a deep Conviction, that the Bible is the appointed Instrument of his religious Proficiency: then let him read it, not as performing a Task, he knows not why, from which he had rather be excused; not to outshine others in Readiness of Quotation, or Plausibility of Interpreting, or *Oppositions of Science falsely so called*ⁱ; not to furnish himself with Weapons for Debate and Controversy, much less for Uncharitableness and Abuse; but to amend his inward State towards God: that, as the excellent Collect in our Liturgy directs, *by the Patience in well doing and Comfort in virtuous Suffering, which we learn of his holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life*^k. Let him accordingly stop on fit Occasions, and think: What Consolations doth this Passage administer to me? What Acknowledgements to Heaven doth this Declaration require from me? What Fear for myself doth this Threatening call for?

^h Eph. ii. 8.
in Advent.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

^k Second Sunday

What Duty doth this Precept or Pattern point out to me? of what Sin doth it convince me? against what Dangers doth it warn me? Is my Character and Behaviour suitable to this Command or Exhortation, this Description or good Example? or do I see myself here, under another Name, reproved, condemned, stigmatized? Have I acquired that Sense of my own Sinfulness and Weakness, of God's Holiness and Justice, of my Need of the Merits of Christ and the Grace of the Divine Spirit, which the whole Tenour of Scripture inculcates: or am I still inclined to stand or fall by my own Righteousness? Faithful Pains taken for some Time in such home Questions, without forcing unnatural Uses out of any Text, but only dwelling on those that fairly present themselves, will make us experience a divine Virtue in the sacred Writings, piercing first and healing afterwards; which, provided we are not satisfied with being piously moved at the Time, and then relapsing into what we were before, but continue the Inquiry steadily, and carry on every Feeling into Practice, will assuredly transform us into what we ought to be. Possibly indeed we may not all receive a very sensible Benefit very soon. Alterative Medicines often

produce their Effect but slowly : and the most perfect Regimen of Diet sweetens and nourishes by unperceived Degrees. We have surely no Title to be impatient under the Hands of our heavenly Physician : perfect Recovery will at Length be the certain Consequence of his Treatment of us : and every single Ingredient in the great Remedy, his holy Word, and every Direction for the Use of it, will contribute its Share to our Cure. Let us therefore conscientiously observe all his Orders, each in their due Place ; and as the only one, for which there is Room left at present, let us intreat his Blessing on our humble Endeavours, that receiving the Seed of *the Word into a good and honest Heart*, we may bring forth Fruit with *Patience*¹ : using for that Purpose the Petitions of his Servant *David*. *Teach me, O Lord, the Way of thy Statutes, and I shall keep it unto the End. Give me Understanding, and I shall keep thy Law : yea, I shall keep it with my whole Heart. Make me to go in the Path of thy Commandments : for therein is my Desire*^m.

¹ Luke viii. 15.^m Ps. cxix. 33, 34, 35.

S E R M O N VI.

I C O R. xiv. 15.

— *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

THESE Words, in their first and strictest Sense, relate to those Gifts of Inspiration, which the primitive Church enjoyed: the holy Ghost then frequently enabling many Members of it, besides the Apostles, to *speak in Tongues*, which they had never learned, *the wonderful Works of God*^a; and dictating to them Petitions and Praises fitted to their Circumstances. But, as the ordinary Gifts of Heaven to Mankind are left to be managed according to the Discretion of those, who enjoy

^a Acts ii. 11.

them:.

them: so the divine Wisdom preserved an Uniformity of Conduct, and kept to the same Rule, in Respect of these extraordinary ones. *The Spirits of the Prophets*, as the Apostle tells us, ver. 32. *were subject to the Prophets*. It was in their Choice, when they would use the Power of speaking with divers Tongues: and on what Occasions they would produce the Prayers and Hymns, with which they were inspired. In this, (and no Wonder,) they did not all of them judge always prudently: their thankful Zeal to publish these miraculous Favours, and perhaps a too great, but very natural, Self-Complacency in being possessed of such remarkable Privileges, prompting some of them sometimes to give Demonstrations of it in their Assemblies, when few or none were present, who understood the Language they spoke: in which Case the Exercise of their Endowments was only a Hindrance to the stated, and though less admired, yet more useful Devotions and Instructions of the Congregation in their native Dialect. And therefore St. Paul, in the true Spirit of Christianity, reproves this Ostentation: reminds them, that the Gift of Tongues was designed to convince Unbelievers by a seasonable Use of it, not to provoke their Scorn, or bring
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Disorder into the Church, by an unseasonable one; that the other Gift of PROPHECYING, teaching Men their Christian Duty, and exhorting them to the Practice of it, (for this the Word means here, and this the *Jewish* Prophets made their chief Business,) was a much more valuable Thing, than that of speaking to Them, or to God, in Languages known to few of them; which therefore they should do modestly and sparingly; never indeed, but when the Speaker, or some one present, was able to interpret what he said so readily and properly, as might edify the Hearers; for their constant Endeavour should be to exert all the Powers of this Kind, which the Holy Ghost had bestowed on them, rationally and discreetly, so as to inform and improve others. *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also:* that is, Every Person endowed with supernatural Abilities, of this or any other Sort, was to think himself bound to employ them in so discreet a Manner, that all around him might be instructed and benefited, as much as possible.

This, you will find, on carefully reading it, is the Meaning of the Text, and of the Chapter

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ter in which it occurs. And the whole shews, both the Truth of extraordinary and miraculous Gifts at that Time; (for had they not been real, no Directions about them could have been wanted, or would have been given;) and also the admirable Wisdom and genuine Goodness of the Apostle, in which we may well presume the rest to have been like him. He permitted not these Accomplishments, wonderful and shining as they were, to interfere with the plain Rules of Order and Edification; or to be at all set on a Level with the humble Virtue of Christian Charity, doing Good to Men from Love of God. Now such Things as these are great Confirmations of our holy Religion, and do it great Honour.

But though the first and immediate Meaning of the Text be what I have now explained; a more general Instruction, and applicable to every Age of the Church, may be justly drawn from it. The same divine Comforter, who inspired the Devotions of Believers then, influences their Hearts in the Performance of them now: the same Duty of using due Precautions to make the Service of the Church intelligible, which the Apostle pressed so strongly in his own Time, equally subsists in ours: And therefore the Words which I have read to you, comprehend

hence two Points of Doctrine, as needful at present as ever they were.

I. That good Christians are assisted by the holy Ghost in offering up their Petitions and Praises. *I will pray with the Spirit: I will sing with the Spirit.*

II. That we should be very solicitous rightly to apprehend the Sense and Fitness of what we say and do in God's Worship. *I will pray, I will sing, with the Understanding also.*

I. That good Christians are assisted by the holy Ghost in offering up their Petitions and Praises to their heavenly Father. The *Spirit of God* hath *striven* with bad Persons^b, and therefore doubtless effectually operated on pious ones, from the Beginning of the World. The Psalmist, on his falling into Sin, prays that God would *not take his holy Spirit from him*^c. And more especially God promises, in the Prophet *Zechariah*, that he will *pour* on his People the *Spirit of Grace and of Supplication*^d. In the New Testament we are told, that *if any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*^e; that *the Spirit helpeth our Infirmities* in Prayer, *making Intercession for us*^f; that we are to

^b Gen. vi. 3.

^c Ps. li. 11.

^d Zech. xii. 10.

^e Rom. viii. 9.

^f Ver. 26.

pray always with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit^s, and praying in the holy Ghost to keep ourselves in the Love of God^h.

But though it be undeniable, that the holy Spirit, who indeed excites us to, and fits us for, every Duty, doth not withhold his Influences in this: yet how far they extend, is Matter of Dispute; and particularly between those who approve, and those who disapprove, Liturgies or Forms of Prayer. And which are in the Right, it shall be the principal Business of this Discourse to shew: not with Intention to raise in you either Hatred or Contempt of any, who dissent from our Church on that Head, (God forbid!) but only to make you more sensible of the Propriety and Advantages of the Way you are in; and incline you to that proportionable Improvement by it, which God will expect.

Some then apprehend, that there is such a Gift or Spirit of Prayer, bestowed by the holy Ghost on true Christians, and peculiarly on all that are worthy to be Ministers of God's Word, as enables them to address themselves to Heaven, on all Occasions, copiously and suitably, in unpremeditated Words of their own: which they

^s Eph. vi. 18.

^h Jude, 20, 21.

think

think ought not to be restrained by appointing Forms, even for the public Use of Congregations. And sometimes the Text is quoted in Support of this Opinion. But plainly, so far as it relates to Words, it relates to Words inspired; to which, in the strict Sense, but few of these Persons themselves lay any Claim: for indeed it would be equalling their own Compositions to the holy Scripture. And excepting this miraculous Gift of inspired Prayer, the Word of God mentions no Gift of ready Expression in Prayer: nor have we the least Ground to consider it as coming from above, any otherwise than as *every good Gift*, every natural Ability, which God hath conferred upon us, and every Improvement, which he qualifies us to make by our own Industry, *is from above*¹. For evidently this Talent is one of that Sort: depending, partly on the Fluency of Speech, to which People are born, partly on the Art and Diligence, which they use to increase it; and varying, as their Health and Spirits vary. Nor therefore is there any more Harm in restraining this Faculty, if good Reasons require it, than in restraining any other. Even the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, you have seen, were

¹ James i. 17.

frequently put under some Restraints: much more then may one of our ordinary Powers. And they who call it limiting and stinting the Spirit, have no Scripture Warrant, either for the Phrase, or the Thing which they understand by it. Nay, supposing the holy Ghost did ever so peculiarly assist in directing the Words of Prayer, why should we not think him as likely to have assisted in the drawing up of the established Forms, as in the extempore Performances of those who reject Forms, and trust to the sudden Dictates of their own Fancy?

The *Spirit of Prayer* and *praying in or by the Spirit*, are indeed Scripture Terms: but, so far as they belong to the present Age, they signify, not being furnished with Variety of Phrases in Prayer, but a much more valuable Blessing, having religious Affections breathed into us by the holy Ghost for the Exercise of this Duty. And *quenching the Spirit*^k, in the only Sense, which can be applied to Us, means extinguishing such Affections, by indulging Sin, or suffering them to die away through Negligence. God is no more delighted with Change of Expressions, than with a Repetition of the same:

^k 1 Thess. v. 19.

nor will ever be weary of a devout Soul, for Want of new Language. Common Reason pronounces this: and the Bible confirms it. We find several Forms of Prayer, prescribed on several Occasions in the Law of *Moses*¹. We find afterwards a whole Book of Forms, the Psalms of *David*. We find our Saviour frequenting the *Jewish* Synagogue, which constantly used a Form, and a very mean one. We find him enjoining his Disciples a Form of his own composing for them: *When ye pray, say, Our Father*^m, and so on. Nay, at the very Time, when the Gift of inspired Prayer was common, there is a strong Appearance in the fourth Chapter of the *Acts*, that the Apostles and their Followers used a Form, there set down. For how else could *they lift up their Voice, and say it with one Accord*, as ver. 24, assures us they did? Probably the very next Age after them practised this Method of public Worship, at least in a good Measure: and for more than 1400 Years past it hath been without Question almost universally the only one. There is not at this Day a Christian Church in the World, but what uses in Part of their Ser-

¹ Numb. vi. 22, 23, &c. x. 35, 36. Dent. xxi. 7, 8. xxvi. 13.

^m Luke xi. 2.

vice, if not throughout it, Forms of human Composition; excepting that of *Scotland*, which had one immediately upon the Reformation, though it afterwards fell into Disuse; and the Dissenters from our own, who, notwithstanding, many of them sing in their Assemblies Hymns that are Forms of human Composition, without Scruple. Yet if extempore Prayers be required, extempore Praises are too. For it is equally said, *I will pray with the Spirit*, and, *I will sing with the Spirit*.

It may be replied indeed, that supposing Forms of Prayer lawful, they are not however expedient. But if that be all, so long as the vastly greater, and the ruling Part think otherwise, ought not the rest to acquiesce? Is it not much less expedient to make a Separation and Division in the Church, when Christ and his Apostles have so strongly prescribed Unity and Submission?

But why are Forms of Prayer inexpedient? It is argued, that they cannot be altered according to Circumstances, which extempore Prayers may. And, with Respect to private Devotion, the Argument is so far of Weight, that though even in this, Forms well chosen are excellent Directions, yet no one should confine himself closely

closely to them, when his Condition, spiritual or temporal, requires him to depart from them: but should omit, or add, or vary, as he perceives Occasion; in which he may well hope, that God's holy Spirit will guide him, so far as is needful. But the Circumstances of whole Congregations, taken together, are in the Main almost always the same: and therefore may be expressed in the same Words. Besides, public Offices make a stated Provision for the more usual Accidents that happen: and public Authority provides for the rest occasionally, from Time to Time. Indeed an established Liturgy doth not allow the Cases of private Persons or Families, or the Situation, real or supposed, of national Affairs, to be enlarged on to God, at the Discretion of the Minister: a Thing never necessary, and seldom proper. It is very sufficient, that they who desire the rest of the Assembly to join with them in Petitions or Thanksgivings on fit Subjects, relating to themselves, have Opportunity afforded them of signifying their Desire: and that general Expressions in the Service may be applied more especially to particular Purposes by each Member in his own Mind, as he conceives there is Need. If these Things be carefully done, Forms of Prayer will

be found not so often defective perhaps in the Matter of uncommon and extraordinary Wants or Mercies, as extempore Prayers in what is far more necessary, expressing common and ordinary ones.

But some insist, that whatever may be said, they experience, that Forms do not edify, and excite Devotion. And this may be true, while they are unaccustomed to them, and come with Prejudice against them. But would they make Trial of them for some Time, with a serious Endeavour of receiving Benefit from them, they would not fail to find that true Spirit of Piety raised by them in their own Hearts, of which we hope they would see many Instances in their Fellow-Worshippers. It is true, a Form doth not afford the Entertainment of Novelty. But that hath nothing to do with Devotion. The Hearer may be highly delighted, the Speaker highly admired: and all this may be mere Amusement of the Fancy, and no Prayer in Reality offered up by Him, who is best pleased with it. What alone deserves that Name, is a reverent Application to God, from a deep Sense of our Necessities and Blessings, and His Power and Goodness: which a Form deliberately precomposed by the joint Counsels
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of a Number of Persons, whom the public Wisdom hath chosen for that End, is surely more likely both to excite, and to express fitly, than the hasty Produce of each private Minister's Invention: especially as he is expected by his People to vary even this continually, though it be for the worse.

One Man will doubtless excell another in this Way: and some perhaps may, really or seemingly, surpass at some Times the public Forms. But what Multitudes would there be, who through Inability, Carelessness, Want of Memory, Diffidence, or Imprudence, would fall vastly short of them, were every Minister in the Nation to use, every Time he officiates, a new Prayer of his own devising upon the Spot? How often doth it happen, were we to know the Truth, amongst the small Number of our Dissenters, that the Person praying hesitates and is at a Loss, omits Things necessary or useful, expresses himself obscurely, improperly, irreverently, works himself into Gestures and Accents by no Means edifying, not to say worse? All which must grievously hurt the Devotion of those, who desire to pay God a *reasonable Service*^a; and bring Thoughts into their Minds,

^a Rom. xii. 1.

extremely

extremely unsuitable to the Work in which they are engaged. Then what Danger is there in this Way, that Men may fill their public Addresses to Heaven with their own private, it may be absurd and pernicious, Notions and Opinions: that national Prayers may change, like Fashions and Fancies, and the Faith of Christians change along with them; which the Weight and Authority of an established Liturgy greatly contributes to keep stedfast, and preserve from noxious Errors? What Danger is there also, that Persons, either by ill Design, or ill judging Zeal, may mix their Interests, their Passions, their Party-Attachments of various Kinds, with the Requests and Thanksgivings, which they utter in the Name of the Congregation; may inflame one Part of a Neighbourhood, one Part of their Fellow-Subjects, against another; stir up some to Mischief, under Colour of its being the Cause of God; and by so doing, make his Worship abhorred by the rest? I am far from charging the Body of those amongst us, who use extempore Prayer, with being guilty of these Things now. I am only representing, what Evils a more general Use of it would be likely to produce, especially in Times of public Discord. Indeed most of them, if not all, it formerly

merly hath produced : and preventing them is much easier, and every Way better, than punishing them.

But supposing these Inconveniences avoided, another, very considerable, would remain. Let their Dislike of Forms be ever so great, the Words of their Minister in praying are as absolutely a Form to Them for the Time, as the Words of a national Liturgy : but with this unhappy Difference, that his Expressions being continually varied, possibly the most judicious, at least the slower and more ignorant, may often doubt of their Meaning ; and the scrupulous, of their Fitness : and though upon Consideration they should be satisfied, yet He in the mean while is gone on to something else. And thus they may follow after him through the whole of a Prayer, and be able to overtake and really join with him in but a small Part of it : whereas a Form may always be examined beforehand ; and when it is once understood and found to be right, our Judgement and Affections will go together in the Use of it, without Let or Hindrance ; and we shall be edified, not in Imagination, but Reality.

Upon the whole, the Reasons for a public Liturgy are so strong, that *Calvin*, the most universally

universally esteemed by our dissenting Brethren of all the Reformers, in a Letter to the Protector of England, under Edw. VI. hath these Words. "*As to a Form of Prayer and of Ecclesiastical Rites, I highly approve that it should be certain, from which it may not be lawful for any Minister to depart: as well in Consideration of the Weakness and Ignorance of some, as that it may more plainly appear, how our Churches agree amongst themselves; and lastly, that a Stop may be put to the Giddiness of those, who affect Novelties.*"

Still I am sensible, that some of the Arguments, which I have urged against Devotions composed by the Minister, may seem to lie equally against Sermons composed by him; and to require, that Instruction be in a constant Form, as well as Prayer. But, besides that one hath been the *Custom of the Churches of God*°, the other not; Prayer is the Voice of the People to their Heavenly Father; and should therefore be preserved, with singular Caution, from every Thing, which they ought not to say, or may not immediately comprehend or approve; else, in such Parts of the Service, either they do not pray at all, or they pray

° 1 Cor. xi. 16:

amiss. But preaching is the Voice of the Minister to the People, which they may weigh and judge of at their Leisure: and even should they fail of learning their Duty from thence, they may learn it from a much higher Authority, the Lessons of Scripture read to them. Further, where a fixed Form of Worship is appointed, Instruction may be left at Liberty more safely; because it will be observed, if the latter contradicts the former: and also very usefully, because a much greater Variety of Things is requisite to be said to the People in Sermons, than is needful for them to say to Heaven in their Prayers. But how proper soever it may be to have some Form, they, who dissent from us, apprehend there are such great Imperfections and Faults in the established Form, that if they must *pray with the Spirit and with the Understanding*, they must not pray by that. Now Imperfections will be found in every Thing human: and if these be a sufficient Objection against our Prayers, it will hold against their own and all Prayers, excepting that of our blessed Lord. From every Thing unlawful we are ready to prove that our Service Book is intirely free. But the Faults of extempore Devotions, which are different in every

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Congregation, and every Time of meeting in the same Congregation, easily escape the Notice of such as are prejudiced in their Favour, who alone hear them ; and when observed, it is only by a few, and they are soon forgotten : while those that are charged on a public printed Liturgy, lie open constantly, Year after Year, to the Censure of every one. And were it possible, that the several Prayers offered up, in any one Day, in the several dissenting Assemblies of this Kingdom, could be written down ; and examined half so narrowly for a short Space, as Ours have been for two Centuries together : can it be imagined, that many times more and worse Omissions and Improproprieties would not be found, in almost every one of them, than They have pretended to find in our Common-Prayer ? Still we are far from saying, it is incapable of any Alteration for the better. Yet this we must say, that most of the Alterations, proposed by some Persons, have been thought by others, every Way their Equals, if not Superiors, by no means to be Amendments. And as eminent a Nonconformist, as ever was, Mr. *Baxter*, hath long since owned, that almost every Church on Earth hath a worse Liturgy, than Ours.

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There hath indeed been *a railing Accusation*², even of Popery, brought against it: though it was first compiled, then reviewed and approved, by Confessors and Martyrs for the Protestant Cause; and several Articles of Popery are as flatly contradicted in it, as can be. Some Parts of it, we acknowledge, were in the *Romish* Offices before: but not one Tenth of the whole, as a very diligent Person hath computed³. Most of this tenth Part also was in much ancients Offices, before the *Romish* Corruptions were introduced. And had it not; as even these Prayers are intirely free from those Corruptions, where can be the Harm of using them? Had our Reformers rejected them, they would have been in Reality never the farther distant from the Papists. And by retaining them, they had a Prospect of bringing many of the Papists over to themselves: by shewing, that they did not act from Passion and Prejudice, but Reason and Consideration; that they respected the ancient Offices and Usages of the purer Ages of the Church, and departed only from modern Abuses and Errors.

It hath also been alledged, that we wear the Habits of the Papists in offering up these Pray-

² Jude ver. 9. ³ Dr. Bennet on the Common Prayer, App. 1. ers.

ers. But indeed, though it were no Way material if we did, ours are very different from theirs. And if wearing any, which are not in common Use, be condemned, what Cause is there for it? why may not sacred, as well as civil Offices of Dignity and Importance, be made somewhat more solemn by Vestments appropriated to them? The Fitness of it hath been confessed by the constant Practice of Mankind, and particularly of the Christian Church in early Ages, and indeed of our Dissenting Ministers themselves; who change their Dress a little, when they officiate. And where is the Harm, if we change ours a little more? Though after all, if the wearing of such Garments by Us of the Clergy were a Fault, it would be intirely our own Fault: and seeing us wear them could surely hurt no Body.

But besides these general Objections, there are several made against particular Passages, which ought to be confuted. This therefore I purpose, God willing, to do in a proper Number of Discourses, on all the stated Offices of our Liturgy: and not only to vindicate what is blamed, but explain also what too many may possibly not understand, and direct your Notice
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to what may not be sufficiently observed. All these Things will very well come under the Head, of which I promised at first to treat.

II. That we should be very solicitous rightly to apprehend the Sense and Fitness of what we say and do in God's Presence. For though censuring without Reason is worse, yet esteeming without Reason is not the Part of wise Men. And some perhaps are mighty zealous for our Liturgy, who yet know but very imperfectly, what good Reason they have to be zealous for it. Indeed amongst many Advantages of public Forms of Prayer, there seems to be one Disadvantage; that the Words of them being in the main continually the same, and thus becoming well known and familiar, we often hear them, and even speak our Share of them, with scarce any Attention to them. But then it is equally true, that we often hear Sermons, though they are new to us, with just as little Regard; and therefore should be likely very soon to hear extempore Prayers also with no less Negligence: which Fault our Liturgy is in several Respects peculiarly calculated to prevent, as I shall hereafter shew you. But still the Danger is great enough, to demand our utmost Care to guard against it. For however good

our public Offices are in themselves, they convey no Good to Us, farther than we comprehend the Import of them, and mind it: which, the better they are, the more they deserve from us. And on the other Hand, were they ever so mean, this would be no Excuse for omitting to get all the Benefit we could from them; but a powerful Motive, though a very unhappy one, to endeavour it most earnestly. Yet thinking them defective and blameable where they are not, or to a Degree in which they are not, as Multitudes have done, will naturally discompose, or deaden at least, our Minds in the Use of them: and therefore should be avoided, as far as it can. Now Persons may indeed by their own private Consideration enter very competently, both into the Meaning and the Grounds of most Things contained in the Liturgy. They, who are able to purchase a few Books, may likewise receive much additional Information from the several very useful Paraphrases and Commentaries upon it, that are extant. And they are much to blame, if they wilfully neglect either of these Things. But still many cannot, and others are not likely to do them. To such therefore I shall attempt to give some Instruction concerning the Service, in which we join.

join so often. The fewer need it, the better: but those who do it, it is of Importance to assist. For with the more Understanding we pray, with the more Pleasure and Earnestness we shall pray. And as on our Praying, as we ought, depends our obtaining God's Grace and Blessing; so on that depends our only true Comfort in this World, and our eternal Happiness in the next.

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S E R M O N VII.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

FROM these Words I have proposed to discourse on the two following Subjects.

I. That good Christians are assisted by the holy Ghost, in offering up their Petitions and Praises to God. *I will pray with the Spirit: I will sing with the Spirit.*

II. That we should be very solicitous rightly to apprehend the Sense and Fitness of what we say and do in his Presence. *I will pray, I will sing, with the Understanding also.*

The former of these Heads I have finished: and after proving its Truth, I made it my chief

Endeavour to prove further, that this Aid from above is not such, as to afford any Argument against using public Forms of Prayer; of which I shewed you both the Lawfulness and the Expediency: answering, at the same Time, some general Objections against our own established Form; but reserving the more particular ones for the second Head: under which I promised to vindicate the principal Things, which have been blamed in the stated Offices of our Liturgy; to explain such as may seem hard to understand, or liable to be misunderstood; and direct your Attention to such, as you may not otherwise observe sufficiently. To this I shall now proceed, following the Order of the Book.

But it will be proper first to take Notice of the laudable Custom, that every one, who comes to join in the Devotions of our Church, should perform, at his Entrance into his Place, a short preparatory Act of Worship in private. Now this, as well as every Thing else, ought to be done *with Understanding*: not to be an unmeaning Formality, in ignorant Compliance with common Practice; but a serious Address to God, that he would enable and incline us to attend in such Manner to what we are about to hear, and say, and do, that we may honour and
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please Him, edify our Fellow-Worshippers, benefit and finally save our own Souls. For which Purpose, either these very Words, which I have mentioned, may be used; or any others of the like Import, chosen by ourselves; or, as perhaps is more usual, those expressive and excellent ones, that conclude the 19th Psalm: *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer.* Only, whatever our Expressions are, we should be extremely careful not to make so very bad a Beginning, as to put up this previous Request either thoughtlessly or insincerely. And the same Care should employ our Minds throughout the whole. For that End, we should avoid, as much as we can, all needless, but absolutely all light and ludicrous Conversation, even before the Service begins. And after it is begun, the fewer of the more transient Intercourses of Civility are exchanged, the better. For surely they make a very unsuitable Mixture with the awful Words, which we are hearing, or perhaps repeating, at the same Time: and must in some Degree take off our Attention from them. Nor will it be a less Hindrance of our Devotion, to remark over curiously, what other Per-

sons are present, what Appearance they make, or how they behave. Let not these Directions, I intreat you, either give Offence, or be despised. Very good People, I fear the very best of us all, transgress them inadvertently, more or less. But a Moment's Reflection will shew any one, that there is great Propriety in observing them: and they will experience more Advantage from it, than perhaps they expect.

Our Service begins, as did that of the primitive Church^a, with a Preface, to dispose more completely the Minds of the Congregation to, a reverent Performance of the Duty, on which they are entering: according to that Precept of the Son of *Sirach*, *Before thou prayest, prepare thyself*^b. And this Preface is composed of Sentences of Scripture, with an Exhortation grounded upon them. Nothing can so effectually awaken us to a pious Frame of Soul, as the Words of God, speaking to us. And the Words, here used, are very prudently selected. They all relate to Repentance and Confession of Sins: which naturally stands first in the Devotions of guilty Creatures, as we all are. Till we feel a genuine Sorrow for having offended

^a Sacerdos ante Orationem, Præfatione præmissa parat Fratrum mentes. Cypr. de Orat. Dom. ^b Eccles. xviii. 23.

God, and come to intreat earnestly the Pardon, which is offered us through Christ, he cannot accept us: and when we do, that will qualify us for every other Part of his Worship.

In these Texts, (you may turn to them in your Prayer-Books, and go through them along with me) we are plainly taught the Nature of true Penitence: that *the Wicked must both turn away from his Wickedness, and do that*, which the *Law* enjoins as *right, to save his Soul alive*: that we must not only *acknowledge our Transgressions* with our Tongues, but have them *ever before* the Eyes of our Minds, to keep us humble and cautious; on which we may pray, in Faith of being heard, that God will treat us with the same Kindness, as if he *hid his Face from seeing our Sins, or blotted them out from his Memory*: that he requires from us, neither the fanciful *Sacrifices* of Superstition, nor the expensive ones of the *Mosaic Dispensation*; but that of a *Spirit contrite* with filial Sorrow, and *broken* to universal Obedience; not outward Expressions of vehement Passion, as *rending the Garments*, but a *Heart* rent and penetrated with a just Sense of what we have done amiss: that on such a Change within we shall find him, not only *slow to Anger* for what is past, and
ready

ready to repent him of the Evil which he was bringing upon us, but bountiful and gracious for the Time to come; though we have deliberately rebelled against him heretofore, and still too often inconsiderately neglect to obey his Voice, and walk in his Laws: that we have Cause to be willing, and even desirous, that he should correct us, when he sees it expedient; but to beg he would do it with that mild and merciful Judgement, which he exercises towards his Children, not with Anger, as his Enemies, which would bring us to final Destruction: that Repentance is absolutely and immediately necessary for us; for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand; the Hour, when we shall, each of us, be admitted into it or excluded out of it for ever, draws very near, and how near we know not: that therefore we must resolve to arise and go to our heavenly Father without Delay, and acknowledge our Unworthiness to be called his Sons: that whatever we may be in our own Eyes, or the Opinion of our Fellow-Creatures, were we to undergo a human Trial only; yet if God enter into Judgement with us, in his Sight shall no Man living be justified: that therefore to extenuate our Faults, and say or imagine, that we have no Sin, or but little, would be

be a fatal *Self-Deceit*, and a Proof against us, that we know not, or own not, the *Truth* of our Case: but if we honestly recall to ourselves and *confess* to God the Errors of our past Life, not only his Mercy, but his *Faithfulness* and *Justice* to his Promises will induce him, both to *forgive* us the Guilt of our Sins, and to *cleanse* us from the Defilement, and deliver us from the Dominion, of all *Unrighteousness*.

It is true, but few of these Sentences are usually read at the same Time: but it will be very beneficial for such as come soon enough, to meditate on them all before the Service begins.

The first Words of the Exhortation, *Dearly beloved Brethren*, express very strongly and properly the good Will and tender Regard, which the Ministers of God's Word should have for their People: who should in Return receive their Admonitions meekly and thankfully, since they *speake* to them *the Truth in Love*.

A following Part of the Exhortation reminds us, that *although* we ought at all Times, even in our private Supplications, *humbly to acknowledge* our Sins before God; yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet to-

* Eph. iv. 15.

gether.

gether. Our Saviour hath laid a peculiar Stress on joint Prayers; and made more especial Promises to those Petitions, which his Disciples put up in common^d: both to unite them closely in mutual Affection, by the mutual Benefits they receive at each other's Request; and to encourage a Practice, which he foresaw would prove so powerful a Means, both of their own Edification, and the Conversion of others. We have Reason therefore to entertain a much higher Esteem, than many do, of the Advantages to be obtained from Constancy in public Worship. But then, the more we expect from it, with the more Care we must qualify ourselves for what we expect: else we shall certainly be disappointed. And as penitent Confession in the Name of Christ is the great Qualification for Pardon and every Mercy; and each one's Example, in the Church, of that or the contrary, must have a good or bad Effect on those around him, we should endeavour, if there be Room for any Difference, to be more than ordinarily humble and fervent there: Yet we are in Danger of being least so, unless we look well to our Ways, and diligently *keep our Foot, when we go to the House of God*^e.

^d Matt. xviii. 20.^e Eccles. v. 1.

In the next Words, after these, the several main Branches of Worship, following Confession, are expressed. And nearly the same Order is observed in the Service, as in the Exhortation. *We render Thanks to God and set forth his Praise, in the Psalms and Hymns; hear his most holy Word, in the Lessons; and ask those Things, which are requisite and necessary, in the Prayers.*

The Conclusion of this Preface, *Wherefore I pray and beseech you, to accompany me with a pure Heart, that is, a sincere one, to the Throne of the heavenly Grace, agrees intirely in Sense, and partly in Words, with that pathetic Declaration of St. Paul: As though God did beseech you by Us, we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God*^f.

The Confession is directed to be said of the whole Congregation, after the Minister. If this be done by each Person, as is also directed, with an humble Voice, he will give no Disturbance to others: and every one must experience, that what he saith, on this Occasion, with his own Mouth, is brought more home to his Soul, becomes more personal and affecting, than if he had silently assented to it, when said for him.

^f 2 Cor. v. 20.

And as it is a very useful, so it is a very old Custom^s; revived in our Church, after being laid aside by the Church of *Rome*; who begin their Service with an Act of Humiliation by the Priest alone, in which the People have no Share.

Another Direction is, that the Confession be said, *all kneeling*. And that Posture in Prayer, especially in this Part, hath not only ancient Authority, but Nature itself, on its Side: and doth so strongly, both express and excite inward Humility, that it should never be omitted wilfully, or negligently, in Favour of Ease and Indolence: Considerations, very unworthy of Notice at such a Time. Still they, whose Infirmities will not permit them to be on their Knees without Pain or Hurt, may doubtless allowably stand, or even sit: for God *will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*^b. And further: As in many full Congregations this Rule cannot be observed by every one, without taking up more Room, than can with Convenience be spared; certainly the superior Rule, of doing *the Things, wherewith one may edify another*ⁱ, binds us rather to be content with standing, though a less eligible Posture, than exclude Numbers of

^s Basil, Ep. lxiii.

^b Matt. ix. 13. xii. 7.

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 9.

our Fellow-Christians from being tolerably accommodated for joining in Worship with us. For kneeling, though greatly preferable, is not prescribed as indispensably necessary. *The Children of Israel*, we read in the Book of *Nehemiah*^k, *were assembled with Fasting*; and, probably for the Reason just mentioned, *stood and confessed their Sins*. The penitent Publican did not fail of being accepted, though he *stood*, when he said, *God be merciful to me a Sinner*^l. And on some Days the early Christians did not kneel at all.

In the first Words of the Confession, we apply to God, as our *Father*: the Author of our Being, and therefore intitled to all Honour and Service from us; the Author of us, after our *Forfeiture*, into his Family again through Jesus Christ, and therefore intitled to have it paid him with double Gratitude. We acknowledge him *Almighty*, either to protect or punish; and therefore to be obeyed from Interest, as well as Duty: we acknowledge him to be *most merciful*; and therefore, in the highest Degree, unfit to have been offended, and fit to have Pardon asked of him.

^k Neh. ix. 1, 2.

^l Luke xviii. 13.

The Expression, *We have erred and strayed from thy Ways, like lost Sheep*, is taken from Scripture. *I have gone astray, like a lost Sheep: seek thy Servant*^m. Again: *All we, like Sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own Way: and the Lord hath laid on Him, on Christ, the Iniquity of us all*ⁿ. But to understand the full Propriety of the Phrase, it must be observed, that both the Likelihood of straying was much greater, and the Consequences of it much more fatal, in open Countries, full of wild Beasts, as those of the East were, than in ours. And such a *great and terrible Wilderness*^o, in the spiritual Sense, is this World.

It hath been objected, that our Confession is too general. But it comprehends all Sins, both of Omission and Commission. The Particulars, each Person's Conscience, if it be duly tender, will represent to itself, as far as is needful, or well can be, in public. And was every Sin, that Men can fall into, expressed by Name, the Catalogue would be too long; and such, that many, (it is to be hoped) could not with Truth join in the whole: nor would it be proper, that they who had, and had not, been guilty, should

^m Ps. cxix. 176.ⁿ Is. liii. 6.^o Deut. i. 19.

confess all the same Things; or that those about us should perceive, which we did confess.

It hath been further objected, that in our appointed Form, there is no Acknowledgement of the original Corruption of our Nature by the Fall. Nor is there an explicit one, even in the Prayer of our blessed Lord. But surely when we say, that *we have followed too much the Devices and Desires of our own Hearts*, it may well be Part of our Meaning, that they are from the first irregular and depraved.

The Words, *and there is no Health in us*, besides that they also profess our inward Frame throughout to be more or less disordered, signify too, that we have no Power of our own, either to cure the spiritual Diseases, of which we are already sick, or to prevent the Attacks of future ones. And therefore we apply to God, that he would *heal our Souls*^p: whom also, in the Conclusion, we implicitly promise, that whatever Amendment shall be produced in us by the Means which he prescribes, we will give the Glory of it, not to ourselves, but to his holy Name: *who hath blessed us with all spiritual Blessings in Christ, to the Praise of the Glory of his Grace*^q.

^p Ps. xli. 4.

^q Eph. i. 3, 6.

After the Confession follows the Absolution: which some have apprehended to be a very Popish Form. But indeed neither of them is taken out of any Popish Service. On the contrary, both of them appeared for the first Time in the second Edition of King *Edward* the Sixth's Common Prayer-book: which was made with the Advice of foreign, and even Presbyterian Protestants. Nay, this Absolution was directly levelled against Popery. For the Popish Absolutions were given in private, separately to each particular Person, positively and without Reversion, in the Name of the Priest: and this is given in public, to all Persons at once, conditionally, if they are truly penitent, in the Name of God. The People were misled by the former Absolutions to a groundless Trust in sacerdotal Power: and would have taken Offence, if after their Confession none had been subjoined. This therefore was drawn up, to be used over them: which tends very powerfully to comfort Men, but can never mislead them; because it leads them to trust only in God's Mercy; and in that no otherwise, than if they *truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel*, proving their Sincerity by their Reformation: on which Terms alone he hath *given his Ministers Power and*

Commandment to pronounce to his People the Absolution and Remission of their Sins.

And as none, but his Ministers, are commissioned to make this solemn Proclamation of Pardon on his Behalf: it is fitly ordered, that none should share with them in publishing it, by repeating it along with them. And you will observe, that wherever in the Service the Congregation are not directed to speak, but the Minister only, their speaking the same Words low, as many Persons inconsiderately do, removes only Part of the Impropriety, and leaves the rest. On this therefore, and the like Occasions, you will remember, that your Business is only to hearken and assent with silent Reverence: of which Reverence, in the present Case, continuing on your Knees, in Token of your humble Thankfulness to God, is undoubtedly a suitable Expression.

After the abovementioned Declaration, immediately follows an Admonition to *pray for Repentance and God's holy Spirit*: which may seem perhaps needless and unaccountable; considering, that we have just been professing to exercise Repentance, and have been assured of God's Forgiveness upon it, of which the Gift of his Spirit is a Consequence. But if it be

considered also, that we are to repent, not only before, but after Pardon; and even the more deeply for the Mercy and Love shewn in our Pardon, else it would be justly revoked; and that the Continuance of God's Spirit with us depends on the Continuance of our Supplications for his Presence, which will also procure us greater Degrees of it; there will be found no Weight in this Objection.

At the End of the Absolution, and of every Prayer, the People are directed to say, *Amen*: which means, It is true; we do sincerely desire, or sincerely affirm, what hath been said. This was the Practice of the *Jewish Church*: it was also that of the Christian in the Apostles Days. *How shall he, that occupieth the Room of the unlearned, say Amen, at thy giving of Thanks, seeing he understandeth not, what thou sayest?* And the subsequent ecclesiastical Writers shew, that it used to be pronounced audibly and fervently: each expressing his own Faith or Desire, and animating that of his Fellow-worshippers. We should therefore by no Means neglect to give this Proof, amongst others, that we not only hear the Service with Attention, but join in it with Earnestness.

1 Cor. xiv. 16.

After

After the Confession and Absolution, comes the Lord's Prayer: it being a very proper Time to address God in that Form, which our Saviour taught his Disciples, when we have approved ourselves his real Disciples, by Repentance of Sins, and Faith in the Gospel-offers of Mercy. And as he directs, *When ye pray, say, Our Father, &c.* our Liturgy accordingly directs, that every one should say it. For so they did in the primitive Church: in which it was called, the daily, the appointed, the public, the common Prayer of Christians. Further: as our blessed Redeemer delivered it twice, and we see it in *St. Matthew* with the Doxology, *For thine is the Kingdom, &c.* and in *St. Luke*, without it; we sometimes use it one Way, sometimes the other.

And now having presumed, in these solemn Words, to claim God for our Father through Christ; for though his Name is not mentioned in this Prayer, it is to be understood by us in every Article of it; we now proceed to vent the Joy and Thankfulness, belonging to such a Privilege: which, I observed to you before, is the second Part of our public Service, as it was in the ancient Church; where, *St. Basil* informs

us; the People, after Confession, rose from Prayer, and went on to Psalmody. But to make the Transition more natural and beneficial, we first beg, that God would permit and assist us, unworthy as we are, to pay him this Homage. *O Lord, open thou our Lips: and our Mouth shall shew forth thy Praise:* which are the Words of David, in his chief penitential Psalm, the Fifty-first. Guilt had shut up his Mouth from the Utterance of chearful Sounds, till Humiliation and Assurance of Pardon gave him that Liberty of Speech again, which, in His Expressions, we pray it may give Us. And some of the earliest Liturgies used the same Verse for the same Purpose: as they did likewise that, which follows here, and which is found in two different Psalms; *O God, make Speed to save us: O Lord make Haste to help us:* it being seasonable at all Times to request, that as our Danger is continual, he would be continually at Hand, to *save us from Sin, and help us in our Duty;* especially when we are just advancing to so sublime a Duty, and one which requires such Purity of Heart. *For Praise is not seemly in the*

* Ep. lxiii.

† Ps. xl. 13. lxx. 1.

Mouth of a Sinner^u, but it becometh well the *Just to be thankful*^v.

The Way then being thus prepared, and having qualified ourselves with holy *David* to say, *My Heart is ready, my Heart is ready, I will sing and give Praise*^x, we rise up from our Knees, and stand upon our Feet. For so we read, that when *the Priests and Levites praised the Lord, all Israel stood*^v. And we begin this good Work with that Summary of all our Praises, to which we shall often return in the Course of them, and in which we shall conclude them: *Glory be ascribed to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the Beginning of Time by Angels, when the Morning Stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for Joy*^z; as it hath been ever since, by religious Persons in succeeding Ages, according to the Degree of their Light; as it is now, by all the Saints in Earth and Heaven, and ever shall be, not only throughout the present Scene of Things, by new Christians rising up in the Place of those who die or fall away, (whatever Men or Devils may do to prevent it) but after the final Consummation, when all are

^u Eccles. xv. 9.
^v 2 Chron. vii. 6.

^w Ps. xxxiii. 1.
^z Job xxxviii. 7.

^x Ps. cviii. 1.

united into one general Assembly: whose triumphant Acclamations to our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, shall resound *World without End*, Duration without Period, in that blessed State, which shall last to Eternity.

And now having proposed the unspeakably great Subject, that we are to celebrate, we invite each other to enter upon it more particularly: the Minister saying, *Praise ye the Lord*; which is the literal Translation of *Alleluia*, so often repeated in the Old Testament, in the New, in the Liturgies of the Universal Church; and the People answering, with joyful Approbation, *The Lord's Name be praised*.

Some indeed of our Dissenting Brethren have thought, and so have some Papists*, that dividing this, and other Parts of the Service, as we do, between the Priest and the Congregation; and allowing the latter to make Responses; (which means Answers) is permitting, not only Laymen, but even Women, against an express Prohibition of Scripture, to encroach on the ministerial Office, makes a disagreeable confused Noise, and hinders many from understanding what is said. But surely the Office of the Minister is sufficiently distinguished, as he presides

* See *Bingham*, l. xiv. c. i. §. 13.

and leads, throughout the Service. And why should not the People be suffered to follow him; and bear some Part with their Voices in praying, as well as the main Part in singing? Not to say, that the principal Article, in which they do bear a Part, is the *Psalms* for the Day, which were designed to be sung, where it could be done conveniently, as I wish it could every where. No Scripture forbids the Congregation to bear a Part: that which forbids Women to speak in the Church^b, means only to forbid their giving Instruction, or entering into Questions or Disputations there. And St. Paul commands us to *speake to one another in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs*^c. Accordingly the primitive Christians are known to have used this alternate Manner in their public Prayers and Praises. And though, when the Psalms and Hymns are spoken thus, and not sung, there is nothing harmonious in the Sound, yet St. John describes the Worship of the Blessed above by the *Voice of many Waters and of a great Thunder*^d; which is no unfit Comparison for the united Answers of a large Congregation. As to the other Part of the Objection, this Method in Reality creates no Confusion or Dif-

^b 1 Cor. xiv. 35.^c Eph. v. 19.^d Rev. xiv. 2.

ficulty at all. A very little Practice will render it easy to any one that can read: even they who cannot read, may join in it, by attending to those near them, or to the Clerk: it makes a grateful Variety, keeps Attention awake, and enlivens Devotion. In this Manner then we glorify God: beginning always with the 95th Psalm, as the whole Christian Church did in early Ages, and as the Nature of the Psalm recommends to us: it being a distinct Invitation to the several Duties of Praise, Prayer and Hearing, with an awful Warning of the Danger of neglecting God, drawn from his Judgements on the disobedient *Jews*, unto whom *these Things happened for Ensamples, and they are written for our Admonition*.*

When we call him, in this Psalm, *the Strength of our Salvation*; we mean, that by his Power alone we can be saved from present and future Evils. When we call him *a great King above all Gods*; we mean, above all that have ever had that Name ascribed to them: the Princes of the Nations, the false Deities of the Heathen, Satan *the God of this World*†, and the holy Angels in Heaven. When we say, that *in his Hands are all the Corners of the*

* 1 Cor. x. 11.

† 2 Cor. iv. 4.

Earth, and the Strength of the Hills is his also; we mean, that his Presence and his Influence extend to the remotest and most inaccessible Places; and there is none, where he cannot deliver or punish. When we call ourselves *the People of his Pasture, and the Sheep of his Hand;* we own our Maker to be likewise our Preserver, Supporter, and Director; who feeds our Souls by his Word and his Grace, as well as our Bodies with daily Bread, and guides us mercifully through this World to a better. *To-day if ye will hear his Voice, harden not your Hearts,* is an affecting and alarming Exhortation, that if we design ever to become his Servants in Earnest, we should hearken immediately to his continual Calls; else through a Habit of Disobedience, our Minds may grow callous, and *past Feeling* *. The Words, *When your Fathers tempted me,* which are put into the Mouth of God himself, the *Jews*, (for whom first this Psalm was composed) were to understand literally, of their Fathers according to the Flesh. But we are to take them of those, who have gone before us in the Profession of Religion: and whom we are not to resemble in *tempting and proving* God, that is, doubting.

* Eph. iv. 19.

and putting to unreasonable Trials, his Omnipotence, his Goodness and Truth: lest, as the unbelieving *Jews* died in the Wilderness, and so were excluded from the temporal Rest, which otherwise they would have enjoyed in the Land of *Canaan*, we also be excluded from what it prefigured, that eternal Rest, which remains for the People of God^h in Heaven.

At the End of this and each Psalm that we repeat, of whatever Nature it may be, we add the same Doxology, that we used at first: Glory being due to God, for every Thing he hath taught, and every Thing he hath done, both in former Times and present; for every Affliction, as well as every Enjoyment. And therefore we do well to observe the Apostle's Rule, of giving Thanks always, for all Things, unto God and the Father, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christⁱ.

Then we proceed to rehearse the Psalms, in proper Portions, according to the Days of the Month: of which it will be needful to say much more, than there is now Time to say. I shall therefore conclude with only remarking in general, that Words of God's own inspiring

^h Heb. iv. 9.

ⁱ Eph. v. 20.

are surely the fittest to praise him in: which being so noble a Duty, we should take peculiar Care to perform it in the most unexceptionable, judicious and affectionate Manner. *When you glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as you can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when you exalt him, put forth all your Strength, and be not weary; for you can never go far enough^k.*

^k Eccles xliii. 30.

S E R M O N VIII.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

HAVING undertaken, first to shew the Lawfulness and Expediency of public Liturgies; then to vindicate, explain and point out such Things in our own, as are most liable to be censured, or not understood, or not sufficiently observed: I have finished the former Head, and proceeded under the latter as far as the Psalms; which very justly make a principal Part of the joint Praises, that we offer up to God. For though several of them were composed on particular Occasions, yet they are plainly fitted for general Use; and their Insertion

tion into the Canon of Scripture proves them to be designed for it: the *Jews* anciently recited them in the Temple, and do still in their Synagogues: the New Testament hath recommended them to Christians; and the whole Church hath sung them ever since. Indeed the subject Matter of them is very different: but those of Joy are much more numerous, than any other Sort: and all of them afford Ground of Praise at least; the doctrinal, the exhortatory, the historical, as well as the rest. Even the plaintive and petitionary minister Cause of Thanksgiving to Him, who hath promised to hear, and support, and deliver; and make *all Things work together for Good to them, that love him*^a. Glory therefore to the blessed three in One is a fit Conclusion to every Psalm.

But in reading them it must be carefully observed, and may with moderate Care be commonly distinguished, in whose Person the several Sentences are spoken. In some Psalms, or Portions of Psalms, it is God or Christ, in others, wicked Men, that speak. These we must repeat, as their Sayings: and none as our own, but what were intended for us. Even the Words of the Psalmist, if we are to adopt them,

^a Rom. viii. 28.

may frequently seem so unapplicable to the outward Condition, or inward Frame, of many in every Congregation, that, if they attend to them, they cannot say them with Truth. But most of them all good People may say, even of themselves singly, with much Truth. For they have constantly Enemies, temporal or spiritual, Afflictions more or less heavy, valuable Mercies, and at Times warm Feelings of pious Dispositions: which, if not present, may be so recalled, and made their own again, as to be very sincerely expressed to God. And what they cannot say in their own Name separately, they may truly say in the Name of Christ's Church, of which they are Members: and they ought, and surely do, bear some Share of the Mercies and Sufferings, the Fears and Desires of every Part of it, in every State. And as *David*, in some of the Psalms, takes on him the Person of Christ; in others he seems to take that of his Disciples: and to speak, not in any one particular Character, but as representing the whole Body of Believers. Or if there be any Passages, which neither of these Methods will suit; still we may rehearse them, as expressing the Case of some eminent Worthy of old Times, and be affected by it accordingly:

for we often are strongly affected by the Circumstances, well described, not only of distant, but of imaginary Persons. We may consider, as we go on, the Likeness, or the Difference, between his Situation, his Temper, and our own: and raise from it many Reflections of Sympathy and Caution, of Humiliation, Encouragement, and Thankfulness. Thus, at least, we may bring every Thing we say, home to ourselves: and by so doing furnish our Minds with a most valuable Store of devout Thoughts and Language, perhaps for many future Occasions of our own or others. For the Book of *Psalms* is so inexhaustible a Treasure of every Branch of Piety, that a more constant Use of it, than of any other in the whole Bible, hath, with very just Reason, been appointed in public Forms of Prayer, and recommended in private ones.

It may be objected, that in several of them *David* utters most bitter Imprecations against his Enemies: in which, to say nothing harsher, we cannot follow him: for the Rule of the New Testament is, *Bless and curse not* ^b. But indeed most, if not all, the Places, which appear Wishes of Evil, may, according to the

^b Rom. xii. 14.

confessed

confessed Import of the Original, be understood only as Predictions of it. Or, supposing them Wishes, *David* might be directed by infinite Wisdom to pronounce them, even against the Opposers of his reigning over *Israel*; who opposed, at the same Time, the known Decree of Providence. Repeating them in this View, solely as His, must be innocent: and strongly suggest an important Admonition, *not to fight against God* *. But perhaps in some of these, as well as other Passages, he speaks in the Person of the whole Church of God, against all its irreconcilable Adversaries, whoever they be. Such was *Judas*: to whom therefore the two most dreadful of these Psalms are applied, *Acts* i. 20. And, with the utmost Tenderness to the whole of God's Creation, we may and must desire the Overthrow of Them, who obstinately hate Him and his Laws. For though we ought much more to desire the Repentance, than the Death of a Sinner, as He himself doth: yet if they will not repent, we ought to think and speak with Approbation and Satisfaction, (yet mixed with an awful Concern,) of their Punishments here, and Sentence hereafter: which last *St. Paul* represents good Persons, as joining

* *Acts* xxiii. 9.

to pronounce: *Do ye not know, that the Saints shall judge the World*^a?

It may be objected further, that however this be, the *Psalms* are unfit for Our Use on another Account: they are full of *Jewish* Notions and Phrases. But they were composed by the Aid of the holy Spirit, with a View to Christian Times: our Saviour appeals particularly to those Things, *which are written in the Psalms concerning him*^c, and they are many. Nor is the Difficulty great, in applying the Peculiarities of one Dispensation to what answers them in the other: of understanding by the Law, the Doctrine of Him, who came to fulfill it; by *Jerusalem* and *Zion*, the Christian Church; by the several Sacrifices, that of our blessed Lord, or of our own Prayers and Praises offered up in his Name; by the Altar, the holy Table; by temporal Enemies and Deliverances, spiritual ones; and so of the rest: thanking God, at the same Time, that we have Light afforded us, to see so much deeper into this and every Book of the Old Testament, than they who wrote it.

Still there may be more Passages than a few in the *Psalms*, which many understand not.

^a 1 Cor. vi. 2.

^c Luke xxiv. 44.

However,

However, even these they may allowably read over, as undoubtedly they often do other Things, in Order and in Hope to understand them: and by reading with Attention, they will come gradually to understand more and more of them. But they would make this much easier to themselves, by reading carefully in private some Paraphrase of the Psalms, if they are able to procure one, along with them: such as the larger of Dr. *Hammond*, or rather of Bishop *Patrick*, or the smaller of Dr. *Nicols* or Mr. *Johnson*. The particular Passages, which one or other may find obscure to him, are too many to be explained from hence. But the darkest and least edifying in Appearance will, by the Use of any of these Authors, be perceived, either to have some one determined Sense of Importance, or at least to be capable of several such.

And indeed all considerate Christians will acknowledge the Excellence of the Psalter in a good Translation. But some object against that, which we have in our Prayer-Books, as made in Times of less Learning and Exactness, than the other in our Bibles: which, being more correct, they conceive ought to be used instead of it. But indeed, as the latter is, in some Places, juster than the former; so is the

former, in some, juster than that. And it hath one general Ground of Preference; that not rendering the Words of the *Hebrew* so strictly, it gives the Sense of them more intelligibly: notwithstanding that a few Expressions, and but very few, are become in the Space of 200 Years, which have passed since it was made, less clear or proper, than they were at first. Indeed this old Version hath here and there Additions to what we now find in the Original. But the only considerable one is taken from, if not warranted by, the New Testament: they are all harmless: they are most of them founded on Authorities not contemptible, particularly on that of the very ancient *Latin* Interpreter, departing from which, without Necessity, would have given Occasion of Cavil to the *Romanists*. And as this Translation in our Prayer-Books was made by Martyrs and Confessors for the Protestant Religion, so it was with Reason highly esteemed by the People; and soon grew, by often repeating it, so familiar to them, that changing it for another, though somewhat better on the whole, would have been disagreeable to them. Therefore the Sense of both being sufficiently the same, (as any one, by comparing them, will be convinced;) the Words, to which

which the Congregation were accustomed, have been retained to this Day.

It hath been objected farther, that, granting the Use of this Translation to be justifiable, yet the Manner, in which we use it, is not. For we read it on, just as the Psalms lie: and thus we blend together those of joyful and those of sorrowful Import, without Distinction and without Method; yet we cannot be supposed to vary our Affections so quick, as this requires. But it should be remembered, that on the principal stated Fasts and Festivals, and on all occasional ones, Psalms proper to them are appointed, out of the common Course. On Days indeed, which have nothing so particular in them, we follow the Order, in which they are set down. For we could not vary it, without omitting some of them, which none of them deserve; or disposing them in a Way intirely new. Now what that should be, would be very hard to settle; and whatever was done, at least as many Faults would be found then, as now. The present Arrangement is certainly older than our Saviour's Days: the public Offices of the whole Christian Church have followed it from the very first Account of them, that we have: and why should we make Alterations,

rations, only to raise Perplexities? The Psalms are indeed miscellaneous. But so are many other Parts of Scripture. The Book of Proverbs is vastly more so. Yet no one objects against reading those, as they lie. In Truth, scarce a Chapter of the Bible, or any Author whatever, can be read, but what calls for Variety of Dispositions and Affections to be exercised, within a very small Compass. Even in a short Prayer is there not great Variety, if it be well considered? In Poetry and Music, these Transitions are often extremely abrupt and sudden, from one Thing to its contrary in the highest Degree. Yet the Mind goes along with them very easily. Much more then may it do so, when prepared, as in the present Case, by a previous Knowledge of what is to come next, and long Practice in the Change. And if repeating the Psalms in Course be right; we have certainly fixed a right Period of this Course, that of a Month: whereas the Church of *Rome* goes through them in a Week, which is making one Part of the Service too long; and the *Greek* Church in Twenty Days, which is making it hard to find. On the whole then, let us but be careful, that our Behaviour be as good in this Branch of Worship, as the Regulation

concerning it is : and notwithstanding the unhappy Disadvantage of barely saying, what ought to be enlivened by the Power of Harmony ; we may still, through God's Grace, be warmed and filled with his Spirit, while we *speak to one another and ourselves*, as the Apostle directs, *in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs, singing and making Melody*, if not with our Voices, yet *in our Hearts, to the Lord*^f.

After the Psalms, it hath long been customary for the Organ, where one is used, to play for a short Time. And as Instruments of Music in Divine Service are certainly lawful (else they had not been appointed in the *Jewish*, or permitted in the ancient Christian Church^g, or described in the *Revelation* as accompanying the Praises of the blessed above;) so a little Pause, for the Use of this Instrument, will not only give some Respite and Refreshment to the Congregation, and to the Minister ; but may be advantageously employed, either to reflect on what is past of the Service, or prepare our Minds for what is to come. And therefore it

^f Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.

^g Ψαλμος ἐστὶν ἢ διὰ τοῦ ὄργανου τοῦ μεσικίου μελωδία. Greg. Nyss. Tract. 2. in Psalmos c. iii. §. 1. Ο ψαλμος λόγος ἐστὶ μεσικός, ὅταν εὐσυνῶς κατὰ τὰς ἁρμονικὰς λόγους πρὸς τὸ ὄργανον κρηται. Basil in Pf. 29. Suic. in voc.

should

should not be filled up either by the Performer with the lighter Airs of Music, instead of solemn Strains, and such as may excite proper Dispositions, or by any of the Congregation with needless Discourse, or such private Thoughts and Imaginations, as blot out good Impressions already made, and indispose us for receiving the like afterwards.

In the next Place follows a Lesson, taken out of the Old Testament: and with this begins the third Part of the Office. That they, who are blessed with a Revelation from God, should read and hear it with Reverence, when they assemble to worship him, is a plain Dictate of Reason and Religion. Accordingly the *Jews read Moses and the Prophets in their Synagogues of old Time*, as the Book of *Acts* informs us¹. And so indeed do Writers of their own, in the same Age with it¹: who boast of the Practice, as a most useful and honourable Distinction, peculiar to their Nation, that the Laws of Life were thus published to all the People. The primitive Christians, as one of the earliest Apologists for them, *Justin Martyr*, tells us, read at their Meetings, both the *Jewish Prophets*, and the Writings of the Apostles, in

¹ Acts xiii. 27. xv. 21.

¹ Joseph. contr. Ap. l. 2. § 18.

proper Portions. And when the Church of *Rome* had broken them into small Fragments, interrupted with other Things; and had continued to read even these in *Latin*, after it was no longer understood: our Church rectified both Errors; and hath taken Care, that the Old Testament should be gone through once a Year, and the New thrice. Only we omit some Parts of the former; which are Repetitions of what is related in other Parts, or bare Lists of Genealogies and Families, or too mystical and abstruse to be edifying in public; on which last Account we omit also the Book of *Revelation*, excepting two or three Chapters: Matters of such Difficulty being wisely thought fitter for the private Meditation and Study of those, who are qualified to engage in them.

The Order, in which the Books of both Testaments are read, is that, in which they stand. Only in the Old, the Prophet *Isaiab*, containing the fullest Predictions of Christ's coming and Kingdom, is placed at the Approach of his Nativity: and in the New, the Gospels and Acts are the Lessons for the Morning, and the Epistles for the Afternoon. In this Manner we make Provision for every Day in the Year: and hence one great Recommendation of daily Attendance

Attendance on public Prayers, (where there are Opportunities for it) is, that by Means of it we shall proceed regularly through the sacred Writings, and preserve the due Connexion of the several Discoveries, made in them to Man. But for the first Lessons on Sundays, those Chapters of the Old Testament are selected, which appeared to be most useful. The second Lessons being from the New, there was no Necessity, and little Room, for Choice. And to Holydays such Portions of both are adapted, as best agree with the Occasion.

But here we are accused of setting mere human Compositions on a Level with the Word of God, by taking Part of our Lessons out of the *Apocrypha*: which also we are charged with frequently binding up in the same Volume with our Bibles. But so we sometimes do our Prayer-Books likewise: yet we never dreamed of equaling either to Scripture. The Articles of our Church expressly distinguish the *Apocrypha* from it: the People of our Church know the Distinction. And that it may not fail to be known, they are marked at the Top of every Page with the Name, *Apocrypha*; which means, hidden; and, on whatever Account it was given to these Books, belongs to them on
this;

this ; that they are to be kept out of the Way, and not produced as Proof, when any Point of Doctrine or Duty is in Question ; whereas the Canonical Books are the Canon or Rule of Faith and Manners. The former therefore we read in the Congregation, not as Divine, but venerable for their Antiquity, and the Spirit of Religion that breathes in them. Still some Parts we pass over, as less useful : some, for the Errors or Improperities, which they contain : and some others, we own, require candid Interpretations. But there seems to be Ground for one such Interpretation, which will remove a good many Objections at once : that some Relations of Things, which perhaps are not literally and historically true, possibly were never intended to be thought so ; but written, like many other justly admired Pieces, for admonitory Fables or Parables. That the Doctrine of them in the Main is excellent, and the Narrations instructive, every one must own. They were quoted with Respect in the first Ages of Christianity : they were read in public from very early Ages : it would have given great and needless Offence at the Reformation to have left them out entirely : and they are never appointed for the Lord's Day : by which Means, it may be, there
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are many Persons in every Parish, who scarce ever heard an Apocryphal Lesson in their Lives. At least the second Lessons are always Canonical Scripture: of which a great deal more is read, besides the *Psalms*, (even in those Churches of ours, which have not Week-day Prayers,) than in any one Congregation of the Dissenters. And therefore they have no Right to reproach us on the present Head.

But supposing we should, any of us, apprehend, that this, or any Thing else, in the Service, mentioned or to be mentioned, might have been better ordered: yet we should always think of the Judgement of others with proper Deference, and of our own with Modesty. And so long as nothing is required of us, contrary to our Duty, we should remember, that our Concern is much more to improve by every Thing, than to object against any Thing: by which last, unless done very discreetly, we may hinder, more than a little, our own Edification, and that of others.

Let us therefore attend seriously to the Lessons read: but with distinguished Reverence to those of Scripture. We are admonished in the Beginning of the Office, that one great End, for which *we assemble and meet together*, is to
hear

hear God's most holy Word. We pray in the Conclusion of it, *that the Words, which we have heard with our outward Ears, may be inwardly grafted in our Hearts.* Both these Places mean, not the Sermon principally, but the Lessons, the Psalms, the Commandments, the Epistles, the Gospels. The Discourses indeed, which we deliver to you from hence, we trust, are agreeable to God's Word: and we desire you to judge of them by it. But Heaven forbid, that you should equal or prefer them to it: as you certainly appear to do, if you hearken to our Sayings, and not to His. Think, I intreat you, then, whether you are not faulty in this Respect: whether you do not often let your Thoughts wander, without endeavouring to prevent it; whether you do not sometimes forget yourselves, and enter into Talk with one another; while *God's most holy Word* is reading to you. It is true, you can read it at Home. But whether you do or not, He and your own Consciences best know. Or if you do: so you can Sermons too. And this would be an Excuse equally, for not attending, or not regarding, either of them. But still this is the Place, in which your Lord and Master hath commanded you to hear both: and hath promised

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to be *in the Midst of you*^k, and bless his Ordinances to you, if you use them as you ought. And what then is your Duty in such a Case?

There are many Things in the Lessons perhaps, that you do not understand: many, which, though you do understand them, yield you very little Instruction or Benefit. But attend to them diligently, weigh them deliberately, think how you may profit by them, consult proper Persons, or Books if you can, about them: and, by quick Degrees, you will both apprehend your Bible better, and esteem it more; and reap such Good from it, as probably you never imagined. At least you will have done your utmost: and God will accept and reward you. I have given you Directions, at large, for the profitable Reading of Scripture, which may be applied, in a great Measure, to Hearing it, and must not now be repeated. But the principal Direction is, *Receive the Seed of the Word into an honest and good Heart*: and you will certainly *bring forth Fruit, with Patience*, unto everlasting Life^l. Say within yourselves at the Beginning, with *Samuel, Speak, Lord, for thy Servant heareth*^m. Say of the

^k Matt. xviii. 20.

^l Matt. xiii. 23. Luke viii. 15.

^m 1 Sam. iii. 10.

more difficult Parts, with *David*, *Open mine Eyes, that I may see the wondrous Things of thy Law*^a. Say of those, that try your Faith, with the poor Man in the Gospel, *Lord, I believe: help thou mine Unbelief*^b. Say of those, that direct your Practice, with the People of *Israel*, *All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do*^c. And be assured of becoming, though not skilful in curious, which *St. Paul* stiles, *foolish and unlearned, Questions*^d and *doubtful Disputations*^e; yet, what is infinitely better, humble and pious, and *wise unto Salvation*^f.

To each Lesson succeeds a Hymn or Psalm: conformably to a Decree of the Council of *Laodicea*, 1400 Years ago, that the public Reading of God's Word should be mixed with repeating his Praises: a most rational Combination, as well as refreshing Change.

The Hymn, called *Te Deum*, derives that Name from the first Words of it in the *Latin*: in which Language it was composed, about the Middle of the fourth Century; and hath been used by the whole Western Church, at least 1200 Years: in that of *Rome*, only on *Sundays* and *Holydays*, and not all those; but in ours

^a Pf. cxix. 18.^b Mark ix. 24.^c Exod. xix. 8.^d 2 Tim. ii. 23.^e Rom. xiv. 1.^f 2 Tim. iii. 15.

every Day, as the singular Excellence of it well deserves. It begins with equal Majesty and Simplicity: *We praise thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. And not we alone, but all the Earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting: every Corner of it having retained some Apprehensions of a supreme Ruler; on which is founded that of St. Paul to the Athenians, Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you*¹. But unspeakably worthier Honours, than those of poor Mortals, are incessantly paid him in Heaven by the holy Angels; mentioned in Scripture, and thence here, under the Names of *Cherubin and Seraphin*; the former denoting probably their unwearied Diligence to serve him, the latter their ardent Love to him: whose Acclamations therefore we humbly presume to adopt, as we find them recorded in that lofty Description of the Prophet. *I saw the Lord, sitting upon the Throne, high and lifted up, and his Train filled the Temple. Above it stood the Seraphims: and one cried unto another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of Hosts: the whole Earth is full of his Glory*². Where it must be observed, that for *God of Hosts* in the Prophet, is *God of Sa-*

¹ Acts xvii. 23.² If. vi. 1, 2, 3.

Sabaoth in the Hymn; the latter being the *Hebrew* Word for the former: which both the *Greek* and *Latin* of the Old and New Testament having preserved, as comprehending more than could be well expressed by a single Term of any other Language; it is preserved in the *English* also, both here, and in two Places of the Epistles^v. And it signifies God to be the sovereign Lord, of the *innumerable Company of Angels*^x; of the Host of Heaven, which the Heathen worshipped, the Sun, Moon and Stars; of the Hosts and Armies of all Nations on Earth; particularly the *Jewish* People, whom he led forth to Battle; and lastly of the Christian Church: which the Old Testament foretold should be *terrible, as an Army with Banners*^y; and the New describes, as furnished, with *Weapons of Warfare, mighty, through God, to the casting down Imaginations and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of Him, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ*^z. This therefore the Phrase, *Lord God of Sabaoth*, means: not, as many imagine, (though it be a Truth, but a very inferior one,) that God is peculiarly *Lord*

^v Rom. ix. 29. James v. 4.^x Heb. xii. 22.^y Cant. vi. 4, 10.^z 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

of the Sabbath^a Day. For the Words are intirely different in the Original, though somewhat alike in our Manner of writing them.

Nor are the Praises of God sung in Heaven by the Angels alone, but by *the Spirits* also of *just Men made perfect^b*; particularly, as we go on to specify, *the Apostles, Prophets and Martyrs*: with whom the *holy Church* yet militant *througout the World* aspires to join, in celebrating *the Father of an infinite Majesty*; *his honourable, true, and only Son*, compared with whom, the highest of all created Beings, is unworthy of that Name; *also the holy Ghost, the Comforter* of every pious Soul. Then returning to *the Captain of our Salvation^c*, we thankfully own, that *when he took upon him to deliver Man from Sin and its Punishment, he did not abhor, and disdain, as beneath him, the Condescension of exchanging the Glories of the Godhead for the Virgin's Womb*; and *when he had overcome the Sharpness of Death, for Us, by suffering it himself, (which alludes to the Words, O Death, where is thy Sting^d?) he opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all Believers.* Not that we mean to say, it was not open at

^a Mark ii. 28. Luke vi. 5.
ii. 10.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 55.

^b Heb. xii. 23.

^c Heb.

all till then; whatever some ancient Fathers may have held: any more, than that *Life and Immortality* were not at all *brought to Light* before *the Gospel*. But as the Light, which Men had antecedently to our Saviour's Coming, was augmented inexpressibly by it: so the Kingdom of Heaven was set open vastly wider, in Consequence of his Sufferings, to receive Believers, not from one People only, and their Neighbours, but the whole Globe. To Him therefore, our Mediator now, *at the right Hand of God*, and who *shall come to be our Judge*, We address our Prayers; that as *we magnify him Day by Day*, (and let us take Care to make good that Assertion,) so he would keep us *this* and every *Day without Sin*; restrain us from offending through Infirmary, as far as will be really for our inward Benefit, but especially from wilful and presumptuous Transgression; and that his *Mercy may lighten*, that is, light or come, *upon us, as our Trust is in Him*.

Instead of the *Te Deum*, another *Canticle*, or Song of Praise, much ancienter, and even more anciently inserted into the Offices of the Church, is allowed to be substituted: which,

* Iræn. Tert. Athanas. Hieron. Aug. Ambr. Basil. Greg. Thaum. Cyril Hieros. & Alex. See Suicer in *ψυχη*.

† 2 Tim. i. 10.

from the first Word of it in the *Latin*, bears the Name of *Benedicite*; and is taken from the Apocryphal Part of the Book of *Daniel*, where it is put into the Mouth of those, who are commonly called the three Children, or young Men, whom *Nebuchadnezzar* cast into the fiery Furnace⁵. It is now very seldom used, at least in parochial Churches: but however contains a noble Acknowledgement of the Glory of God in his Works of Creation, the Memorial of which was the original Design of the Sabbath Day; and might be justly preferred to the former, whenever there is particular Occasion to return Thanks for the Blessings of Nature. An Objection indeed hath been started, that in it we pray to the *Angels and Spirits of the Righteous*, to *bless the Lord*. And it might as well have been objected, that we pray to the *Winds and Fire, the Frosts and Snow*, to bless him. Plainly all this is no more than a Figure of Speech, though a very sublime one: lending as it were a Tongue even to inanimate Creatures, and calling both on those which do not, and those which cannot, hear us, to glorify our common Maker; just as is done in the 148th Psalm, of which this Canticle is an evident Imitation.

⁵ Dan. iii. 21.

After the second Lesson, is appointed, either the Prophecy of *Zacharias* in St. *Luke*, or the 100th Psalm: called for the Reason, which I mentioned before, *Benedictus* and *Jubilate*. The former was uttered on the Birth of *John* the Baptist: and is a Thanksgiving for the Redemption of Mankind, of which He was to publish the speedy Approach. It copies very nearly the Stile of the *Jewish* Prophets, who described spiritual Blessings by temporal Images. Thus, meaning to praise *the Father of Mercies*^h for delivering all Nations from the Dominion of the wicked one, it *blesse*s the Lord God of *Israel*, for saving his People from their Enemies, and the Hand of those that hate them. Now this Kind of Language was laid aside after our Saviour's Ascension: and therefore the Prophecy before us is not of later Date, but genuine. Yet it sufficiently explains, to what Sort of *Salvation* it refers: by mentioning the *Remission of Sins*, the giving of *Light* to them that sat in *Darkness*, and guiding their Feet into the Way of *Peace*. And so it may teach us both the Fitness, and the Method, of assigning to the Old Testament Predictions an Evangelic Interpretation. You will be sure, in repeating it, to re-

^h 2 Cor. i. 3.

member, that the Words, *And thou, Child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest*, belong not to our Saviour, but the Baptist. And you will easily apprehend, that if in the Dawning, which preceded the *Sun of Righteousness*¹, good *Zacharias* offered up his Thanks with such Transport, we, to whom he shines out in full Splendor, ought to recite it with double Gratitude.

The 100th Psalm, which, being somewhat shorter, and the Service long, we use the more frequently, is peculiarly proper after a Lesson from the Gospel, since it peculiarly relates to the Gospel Times: as appears from its inviting *all Lands to be joyful in the Lord*, declaring them equally *God's People, and the Sheep of his Pasture*, and calling on them equally *to go into his Gates, and praise him for his Mercy and Truth*. And may we all accordingly so *praise and serve him in his Courts* here below, that we may for ever dwell in his *Tabernacle and rest on his holy Hill*² above, through Jesus Christ our Lord, &c.

¹ Mal. iv. 2.

² Ps. xv. 1.

SERMON IX.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

I HAVE hitherto explained and vindicated the daily Service of our Church, as far as the Creed: which is placed between the third Part of it, the Lessons; and the fourth, the Petitions: that we may express that Faith in what we have heard, which is the Ground of what we are about to ask. For as *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*^a: so we must *ask in Faith*, if we think to receive any *Thing of the Lord*^b. For how shall we call upon Him, in whom we have not believed^c?

^a Rom. x. 17.

^b James i. 6, 7.

^c Rom. x. 14.

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But as all the Doctrines of Scripture, though equally true, are not of equal Importance; the more necessary Articles have been, from the Beginning of Christianity, collected into one Body, called in Scripture, *the Form of sound Words*^d, *the Words of Faith*^e, *the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ*^f: but in our common Way of speaking at present, the *Creed*, from the *Latin* Word, *Credo*, which signifies, *I believe*. Now the ancient Churches had many such Creeds: some longer, some shorter; differing on several Heads in Phrase, but agreeing in Method and Sense: of which, that, called the *Apostles Creed*, is one. And it deserves this Name, not so much from any Certainty, or great Likelihood, that the Apostles drew it up in these very Expressions; (though some, pretty early, and many since, have imagined they did) as because it contains the chief Apostolic Doctrines; and was used by a Church, which, before it grew corrupt, was justly respected as the chief Apostolic Settlement; I mean, the *Roman*.

As with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness, so with the Mouth Confession is made

^d 2 Tim. i. 13.^e 1 Tim. iv. 6.^f Heb. vi. 1.

unto Salvation : of which Confession, repeating our Creed, though not a necessary, is a rational and commendable Act. We do not indeed find it to have made Part of the oldest public Offices : but surely it is full as proper for these, as for private Devotions; in which the primitive Christians all said it daily^a. And as every one's Profession of Belief is his own separate Act, so the Creed is worded for every one separately in the singular Number : and therefore unless we say it along with the Minister, he alone testifies His Faith; not We, Ours. Nor should it by any Means be with Negligence and Indifference, that we profess our Faith. For what we believe is the only just Foundation of what we do, or hope, or fear. On this Account we stand at the repeating of the Creed : to express our Steadfastness in it; and our Readiness to *contend earnestly*, in every proper Method, *for the Faith, once delivered to the Saints*^b. Turning, at the same Time towards the East, as many do, is an ancient Custom; as indeed, in most Religions,

^a Rom. x. 10. ^b Symbolum quoque specialiter debemus—
antelucanis Horis quotidie recensere. Ambros. de Virg. l. 3.
p. 115. ap. Bingham. l. 10. c. 4. §. 17. Quis non quotidie recitat
ore, Credo, &c. Lib. de duplici Martyrio, Cypriano falso
ascript. in fine. ¹ Jude ver. 3.

Men have directed their Worship some particular Way. And this Practice being intended only to honour *Christ*, the Sun of Righteousness, who hath risen upon us, to enlighten us with that Doctrine of Salvation, to which we then declare our Adherence; it ought not to be condemned, as Superstition: and yet, being neither obligatory in itself, nor commanded by Authority, the Omission of it ought not to be censured as Irreverence or Disobedience.

Another Thing, yet more usual in saying the Creed, is to bow, when the Name of *Jesus* is mentioned. And some have thought that to be their Duty, whenever it is mentioned, at least in Divine Service: because they find in their Bibles the Words, *that at the Name of Jesus every Knee should bow*^{*}. But this is no ancient Notion: and the Generality of judicious Commentators allow it not to be the Meaning of the Place: a more exact Translation of which would be, *that in the Name of Jesus every Knee should bow*, that is, every one should pray: according to that other Passage of St. Paul, *I bow my Knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you, &c*¹. However, it is a Practice of some Antiquity; and,

^{*} Phil. ii. 10.

¹ Eph. iii. 14.

whatever a few over-scrupulous People have imagined, surely a harmless one: For no Body means to worship the Sound; but the Person, whom it denotes. And though we confess, there is no more Reason to worship the Son of God, by bowing to him, than the Father; nor to worship him, on hearing the Name, *Jesus*, than the Name, *Christ*: yet it is not good to be contentious about an innocent Custom^a; which also may help Attention, and increase Devotion. Besides, it is authorized by the 18th Canon of our Church, which directs, that *when, in Time of Divine Service the Lord Jesus shall be mentioned, due and lowly Reverence shall be done by all Persons present, as it hath been accustomed.* Possibly these last Words may be designed to intimate, that Fear of giving Offence by leaving off the Custom was a principal Motive to the Injunction. And if so, in Proportion as that Danger abates, the Injunction grows less important. Accordingly they, who are intrusted with the Execution of the Canons, have not lately, if ever, enforced it, or laid Stress upon it. And indeed, as the greater Part of most Congregations disregard it, except in the Creed, they ought not to judge hardly of those,

^a 1 Cor. xi. 16.

who omit it then also : however proper they may think it, for themselves, to distinguish that Part of their Belief, which peculiarly belongs to them as Christians, from the preceding, by this Gesture.

Having explained the Apostles Creed at large, in several Lectures on the Catechism, I shall add nothing more concerning it here. But there will be need to take some Notice of another, appointed to be rehearsed in its Stead, on the principal Festivals, and several other Holy-days, and called the Creed of St. *Athanasius* : not that he was the Author of it, though it was probably made pretty near, if not in his Time, who lived 1400 Years ago ; but because it expresses that Faith in the Trinity, of which he was a principal Defender. And as the *Romanists* threw on the Reformers of our Church all Manner of Calumnies, that they could, so it would have given them a great Handle against us, had this Creed, which they repeat every Sunday, been rejected or altered by us.

Many indeed have argued against the Use of it ; and some, with strange Vehemence : partly from the Doctrines, which it teaches ; but chiefly from the Condemnation, which it pronounces

nounces on all, who disbelieve them. Now the Doctrines are undeniably the same with those, that are contained in the Articles of our Church, in the Beginning of our Litany, in the Conclusions of many of our Collects, in the *Nicene Creed*, and, as we conceive, in that of the Apostles, in the Doxology, in the Form of Baptism, in numerous Passages of both Testaments: only here they are somewhat more distinctly set forth, to prevent Equivocations. Any one, who examines into the Matter, will easily see it to be so. Accordingly our Dissenting Brethren, after they had long objected to other Parts of our Liturgy, consented readily to subscribe this Creed: the Articles of which are the common Faith of the Catholic Church, or by immediate Consequence deducible from it; and little or nothing more. There are indeed several Things in them, beyond our Comprehension, as to the Manner: but the Scripture hath the same. There are Expressions, which may seem liable to Exception: but it must be for Want of understanding them, or admitting fair Interpretations of them. The Assertion, that *there is one Father, not three Fathers*, and so on, may appear to the Ignorant, needless and trifling: but was levelled against Heresies, then in Being, which

which took away all Distinction between the three Persons. That *none is before or after other*, means, (as the following Words, *but the whole three Persons are coeternal*, prove,) that none is so in Point of Time, not that none is so in the Order of our Conceptions: for the Scripture directs us to consider the Father, as first. That *none is greater or less than another*, is reconciled to our Saviour's Assertion, *The Father is greater, than Iⁿ*, by what follows in the Creed, *Equal as touching his Godhead, inferior as touching his Manhood*. That he is *one, altogether, not by Confusion of Substance, but by Unity of Person*, means, (for so the next Words explain it,) that as each of Us is one Man, not at all by blending the Soul and Body into one Substance, for they are still distinct, but *altogether*, by a mysterious Union of the two: so he is one Christ, not at all by blending the Divine and Human Nature into one Substance, but altogether, intirely and solely, by an Union of Them, yet more mysterious than the former is.

The Condemnation, contained in two or three Clauses of this Creed, belongs, (as the most zealous Defenders of our Faith in the holy Trinity agree, and as every one, who reads it con-

ⁿ John xiv. 28.

fiderately,

siderately, will soon perceive,) not to all, who cannot understand, or cannot approve, every Expression in it; but only to such, as deny in general *the Trinity in Unity*, or three Persons, who are one God. *This alone is said to be the Catholic Faith.* The Words, that follow after, *For there is one Person of the Father*, and so on, are designed only to set this forth more particularly. And the Conclusion from the whole is, not that in *all Things*, which are *aforesaid*, by the Use of every Term above mentioned, but in *all Things*, *As is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped*: meaning, that as at first it was said, that in all Acts of Faith we are to believe in each Person, so here it is added, that in all Acts of Worship we are to adore each: never considering one, even while addressed distinctly, as separated or separable from the other two. Now this Trinity in Unity we apprehend to have been, ever since it was fully revealed, a fundamental Article of the Christian Faith. And yet those, who believe not even so much, the Creed no otherwise teaches *cannot be saved*, or *shall without Doubt perish*, than as our Saviour teaches concerning the whole of the Gospel: *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved: but he, that believeth not, shall*

be damned°. Our Condemnation is no more hard and uncharitable, than His. And neither is so: because both are to be interpreted with due Exceptions and Abatements. Suppose a Collection of Christian Duties had been drawn up; and it had been said, in the Beginning or at the End of it, *This is the Catholic Practice, which except a Man observe faithfully, he cannot be saved*: would not every one understand, that Allowance must be made for such Things, as a Man through involuntary Ignorance mistook, or through mere Infirmary failed in, or was truly sorry for, as far as he knew he had Cause? Why then are not the same Allowances to be understood, in speaking of Doctrines? For when the Creed says, that *Whoever will be saved, before all Things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith*; it doth not mean, that true Faith is more necessary, than right Practice: but that naturally it precedes it, and is to be first learnt in order to it. The Intention therefore of the Creed, as well as of our Lord in the Gospel, is only to say, that whoever rejects the Doctrine of it, from presumptuous Self-Opinion, or wilful Negligence; and doth not afterwards repent of these Faults; particularly, if he is made

• Mark xvi. 16.

sensible of them; or if not, at least in general, amongst his unknown Sins; the Case of such a one is desperate. But if Want of Information, Weakness of Apprehension, or even excusable Wrongness of Disposition, should make him doubt or disbelieve any or the main Part of this Creed; nay, which is vastly a worse Case, the whole Revelation of Christianity: though we pass Judgement on his Errors without Reserve; and, in general, on all who maintain them; yet personally and singly we presume not to judge of his Condition in the next World. *To his own Master he standeth or falleth* ^P. Much less would we think unfavourably of any one, who takes these condemning Clauses in too rigorous a Sense, and therefore only is afraid, from a Spirit of Charity and Humility, to join in them. Indeed, for the Sake of such, it may seem Pity, but either they had been originally omitted; (since though defensible, they are not necessary to be inserted in a Profession of Faith;) or the Limitations, with which they are to be understood, had been signified in two or three comprehensive Words.

After our Creed, we go on to our Petitions. In these, the Minister and People first recom-

^P Rom. xiv. 4.

commend each other to our blessed Redeemer, in Terms of Scripture, which a Council, held near 1200 Years ago^a, affirms to be used for this Purpose by the Direction of the Apostles, and may certainly well be used so without it: *The Lord be with you: And with thy Spirit*. Then we make a direct Application to him, under the Names of *Lord* and *Christ*, repeating it thrice, as a Mark of our Earnestness, that he would *have Mercy upon us*: Words often addressed to him, when on Earth; often solemnly reiterated by the whole ancient Church, and spoken by the *Latin Church* in the original *Greek* of the New Testament, *Κυριε ελεησον*, but much more prudently translated by ours into *English*.

This done, as before we subjoined the Lord's Prayer to our Confession, to obtain the Confirmation of our Pardon; so now we prefix it to our Requests, as a Summary of our Desires. And surely saying it again at such a Distance, and with so different a View, cannot be thought a *vain Repetition*.

After these general Prayers, we express to God distinctly, in short Sentences, the several

^a Conc. Bracarense 1. A. D. 563. Can. xxi. ^b 2 Thess. iii. 16. ^c 2 Tim. iv. 22. ^d Matt. xv. 22. xx. 30, 31. ^e Matt. vi. 7.

Heads of the Supplications, which we are about to offer up more at large, for Peace, and Grace, for the King, the Clergy, and the People. And all these Sentences are conceived in Words taken from the *Psalms*: excepting one, *Give Peace in our Time, O Lord*; which hath a Reason added to it, by some thought improper; *Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God*: whereas, say they, we often have others to fight for us; and if we had Him alone, why should we despond, and immediately pray for Peace upon it? But these Objectors utterly mistake our Meaning: which is, that whatever Help we have besides, we look upon it as nothing, without that of the Almighty; whom therefore we beg, in the Words which they unjustly blame, when we are in Peace, to continue it, by restraining such as would disturb it; and when we are not, to restore it, by turning the Hearts, or overthrowing the Attempts, of those who have infringed it.

In Consequence of these Preparations, the Petitions themselves follow: not in one long Prayer, but several short ones; which Method is certainly as lawful as the other; and, we think, more expedient. It reminds us oftener of the Attributes of God, and Merits of Christ,

which are the Ground of our *asking in Faith* : and by the Frequency of saying, *Amen*, it stirs up our Attention, and warms our Devotion, which are too apt to languish. These short Prayers have the Name of Collects : either from their collecting much good Matter, particularly out of Scripture, into a small Compass ; or from their being originally composed for the People to use, when collected and assembled together. And the first of these Collects is, That for the Day. Besides the Lord's Day, which is the weekly Memorial of all God's Goodness to Us, and our Duty to Him, we have annual ones, to celebrate, not only the principal Parts of the History of Christ, but also the holy Lives and Deaths of his chief Followers, who are mentioned in the New Testament. For, as *the Righteous are to be had in everlasting Remembrance* * ; and the Epistle to the Hebrews particularly directed the first Christians to *remember them, which had had the Rule over them, who had spoken unto them the Word of God* † : as they did accordingly pay distinguished Honours to the Memories of the Apostles, Evangelists and Martyrs : and as the Church of Rome, which had gone much too far in this

* James i. 6.

† Ps. cxii. 6.

‡ Heb. xiii. 7.

Matter,

Matter, would notwithstanding have had a great Advantage against us, if we had neglected it intirely; we do therefore, on the Days, which bear their Names, read Portions of holy Writ relating to them, return Thanks to God for their Labours and Example; and beg, that we may profit suitably by them. This then makes a considerable Proportion of the variable Collects. The rest are appointed, one for each *Sunday* and Week in the Year. And the Intention, however imperfectly executed, must have been, that sometimes praying more explicitly for this Grace or Mercy, sometimes for that, we may be likelier to obtain, through God's Goodness, all that are needful for us.

The Objection, that our Service is taken from the *Popish*, affects chiefly the Collects. But those of ours, which are the same with theirs, are mostly derived from Prayer-Books, brought over in the Days of that Pope, by whose Means our *Saxon* Ancestors were converted to Christianity, above 1100 Years ago: and they were old ones then; much older, than the main Errors of Popery. However, partly at, and partly since, the Reformation, such of the Collects in those Books, as wanted and deserved it, have been carefully corrected; many, that were thought

improper, quite removed; and new ones framed in their Stead. But why should those be changed, which are both faultless in themselves, and recommended by venerable Antiquity?

After the Collect for the Day, come two constant ones, to be used every Day, *for Peace and Grace*; general Words, comprehending between them all Blessings, temporal and spiritual. In the former, which is translated from the ancient *Latin* Offices, we beseech God, *in the Knowledge of whom standeth our Hope of eternal Life* hereafter, and *whose Service*, in proportion as we improve in it, gives us here *perfect Freedom* from the Tyranny of Sin, and the Stings of an evil Conscience, would likewise so *defend us in all Assaults of our outward Enemies*, that *trusting in Him*, we may not fear Them. Thus we embolden ourselves from the Consideration of his greater Mercies, to hope for the lesser: In Imitation of the Apostle's Reasoning, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us, how shall he not with him also freely give us all Things*? The latter of these Collects is not taken from the *Roman*, but principally from the *Greek* Service, as others of our Prayers besides are: the Compilers of

* Rom. viii. 32.

our Liturgy prudently extracting, from both, what was proper to enrich and add Authority to the Work, in which they were engaged. And it begs that Protection of God more especially for the present Day, which the former begs in general: but above all, *that we may fall into no Sin* even undesignedly, much less *run into any Kind of Danger* of it wilfully, but *do always what is righteous in his Sight*.

After these Collects, follows, on *Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays*, the Litany. But I shall speak of that hereafter, God willing; and proceed now with the stated Service of the other Days of the Week: in which, having put up the before-mentioned Prayers for ourselves, we begin our Intercessions for other Persons; and first for *the King, as supreme*^a: in Obedience to the Apostle's Injunctions^b, and in Imitation of the primitive Christians, even while they lived under Heathen Emperors. The Duties of that Station being very important and difficult, and the Hazards of erring and sinning in it many and great, We therefore pray Him, who is *the only Ruler* of the Heart and Conduct of *Princes*, and *beholds* the State of *all the Dwellers* in their Dominions every where *on Earth, to replenish*

^a 1 Pet. ii. 13.^b 1 Tim. ii. 1.

our Sovereign, both with the Graces and the Gifts, needful for him: to grant him long to live in Health and Wealth; that is, Prosperity; as we pray God, in the Litany, to deliver us in all Time of our Tribulation, in all Time of our Wealth; to strengthen him, that he may overcome all his Enemies, all that wish ill to Him or his People; and finally to bestow on him everlasting Felicity.

Then, because the Royal Family are the future Hopes of the Public, and in the mean while their whole Behaviour is of very great Consequence to it: we apply more distinctly than the ancient Church did, but surely with Reason, to the Fountain of all Goodness, who therefore is able to supply the Branches, as well as the Root, for such Blessings on every Branch, especially the principal by Name, as their Condition requires.

After this, we pray for the whole Clergy and People of our Land: that he, who alone worketh great Marvels; who hath in all Ages marvelously protected his Church against the Devil and wicked Men; who endued his Apostles with marvellous and miraculous Gifts on the Day of Pentecost, and by their Means many others; who doth and ever will produce marvellous

vellous Effects on the Hearts of Believers by the Ministry of his Word and Sacraments, and who only can do such Things; would *send down the healthful*, that is, the healing, strengthening and saving, *Spirit of his Grace, on all Bishops and Curates*; Persons, to whom the Cure or Care of Souls is intrusted; for this the Word, *Curate*, signifies throughout the Prayer Book, not merely those Ministers who assist the proper Incumbent; and likewise on *all Congregations committed to their Charge*. And we further beseech him not only to bestow on them at first good Dispositions; but (*that they may truly and lastingly please him*) *pour upon them his continual Blessing*, like a kindly Dew descending from above. *For neither is he that planteth any Thing, neither he that watereth, but God, that giveth the Increase*.

Next to this, *in the Time of War*, we address ourselves to the *Almighty Governor of all Things*, whose *Justice in punishing us Sinners* with this Evil we acknowledge, and whose *Mercy to deliver us from it, on our true Repentance*, we hope for, and cannot hope for it else: complaining of the *Pride and Malice of our Enemies*; of which they must be guilty, if

1 Cor. iii. 7.

the

the War on but Side be lawful, otherwise there would be Peace: and in the genuine Spirit of Christianity intreating, that the one may be *abated*, the other *assuaged*; which is praying for Them, as well as ourselves. And till they suffer their Dispositions to be mended, We beg that their *Devices* and Enterprizes may be *confounded*: which Word, as dreadful as it sounds too often in passionate common Speech, means here no more than, disappointed: and this is the worst we wish, even to those who *hate us and despitefully use us* ¹.

There is also appointed a very fit *Prayer to be read during the Session of Parliament*, for a Blessing on their Consultations. But here it may be asked, how the Compilers of it could venture to call in it every one of our Kings, in all Time to come, *most religious*. Now certainly they did not intend to prophesy, that, in the common Meaning of the Word, they always would be so: nor yet to require, that we should call them so in a Sense, that was not true. And therefore they must either mean by *Religious*, (what it sometimes means in the Language, from which it is derived,) the Object of most awful Regard, sacred, a Title fre-

¹ Matt. v. 44.

quently ascribed to Kings: or indeed rather, *most religious* must be understood in the same Manner, as the next Word to it, *Gracious*, constantly is, without the least Difficulty or Scruple, both in the Liturgy and out of it; and as the Titles, *most Christian*, and, *most Catholic* are; to denote the good Qualities, which Princes profess, and should have; and therefore their Subjects are willing and ought to hope they have; and by reminding them, endeavour that they may have. Accordingly this very Epithet, *most religious*, was constantly ascribed to all successive Emperors in St. *Cbrysfom's* and St. *Basil's* Liturgies, the common ones of the *Greek* Church, as it is to all successive Kings in ours. The Intention being thus cleared, the Lawfulness of joining in the Expression is evident; In the Prudence of chusing it originally we are less concerned. Yet in Defence of that we may plead, that this Prayer was composed and originally used in the Reign of a Prince, acknowledged to be unfeignedly religious, King *Charles* the first*. And whatever Scruples have been raised concerning the Propriety of this Part of it in some Reigns since, happily there is no Room for them in the present.

* See Wilkins Cont. Vol. 4. p. 539.

After

After these particular Intercessions, we add a general one for all Mankind, especially for all Christians, and most especially for all that are in Affliction : to which we subjoin as general a Thanksgiving for all God's Mercies to Us and Them ; but above all, for That, which gives us a Claim to eternal Happiness. Neither of these Forms is taken from any other Liturgy : both are excellent : and every one, who desires it, may, by signifying that Desire, have a separate Share in either. This Provision is a very useful and comfortable one : and we exhort you, on all fit Occasions to take the Advantage of it. Only we must beg, that they, who have received Benefit by being prayed for, will not forget to return Thanks ; but conscientiously avoid our Saviour's Reproof : *Were there not ten cleansed ? But where are the nine ?*

The general Thanksgiving may perhaps to some appear superfluous, after we have thanked and praised God in the Use of the Psalms and Hymns. But it was inserted at the Restoration, because others complained it was wanting. And indeed it is a more methodical Summary of the several Mercies of God to Us and to all Men, than we had before : it furnishes an Opportu-

Luke xvii. 17.

nity

nity of thanking him more expressly for the late Instances of his *loving Kindness* to the Members of our own Congregation: and besides, as we cannot be too thankful to God; the Acknowledgements, which we offered up in the Beginning of the Service, are very properly repeated in the End. For surely we ought to ask nothing of God, without remembering, what we have received from him: which naturally excites both our Faith and Resignation; and prepares the Way for that admirable Collect, with which we conclude.

It is taken from the Middle of *St. Chrysostom's* Liturgy: but much more judiciously placed in the Close of ours. It first thankfully confesses the great Goodness of our blessed Redeemer, in disposing our Minds, of themselves so variously and wrongly inclined, to ask unanimously of Him such Things as we ought, and encouraging our Applications by such explicit Assurances of hearing us. Then it submits entirely to his Wisdom, in what Manner, and how far, he will think it for our Good to grant us any of our particular Requests; begging nothing absolutely, but what he hath absolutely engaged to bestow on our Prayers and Endeavours; *viz.* that practical Knowledge here of *his Truth*, his Doctrines

Doctrines and Precepts, in his Promises and Threatenings, that hereafter we may attain *everlasting Life and Happiness*.

These Things done, it can only remain, that on departing from God's more immediate Presence in his Church, we intreat for ourselves and one another, (as we do accordingly in the Words of Scripture *) the continual Presence of the Holy Trinity, wherever we go: that *Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, which will secure us *the Love of God the Father, and the Fellowship*, that is, the Communication of the needful Warnings and Assistances of *the holy Ghost*.

Now what we thus faithfully ask, may we effectually obtain, to the Relief of our Necessity, and the setting forth of God's Glory, through *Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

* 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

S E R M O N X.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

THE Liturgy of our Church has now been explained to you, as far as the End of the Morning Prayer. The Evening Prayer hath nothing different from it; excepting the Hymns, that follow the Lessons, and the two Collects after that for the Day.

The Hymn after the first Lesson, called *Magnificat*, from the Word, with which it begins in the *Latin*, was used anciently by the Western Church; and continues to be used by the Protestants Abroad. It is the Song of the blessed

VOL. VI.

R

Virgin,

Virgin, recorded by St. *Luke* ¹, on the Confirmation which she received, at *Elizabeth's* House, of what the Angel had told her, that she should become the Mother of our Lord, by the Operation of the holy Ghost: and it expresses most naturally the Transport, which on that Occasion she must feel; but, like the Hymn of *Zacharias*, in Phrases of the Old Testament, to be interpreted from the New; of which Matter I have already spoken.

My Soul doth magnify the Lord, doth acknowledge the infinite Greatness of his Power and Mercy: *for he hath regarded the Lowliness of his Hand-maiden*; that is, the *low Estate*; for so the Original signifies, and so it is expressed in our Bibles; not the Humility of Mind, which the holy Virgin was too humble to ascribe to herself. *From henceforth all Generations shall call me blessed*: as We do accordingly, both by repeating this Hymn, and in our common Speech. *For he, that is mighty, hath magnified me*, hath raised me to great Honour: *and holy is his Name*; his Truth, his Justice, his Mercy, his Concern for the Goodness as well as Happiness of his Creatures, are gloriously manifested in this wonderful Dispensation. *He*

hath shewed in Times past, and will as certainly now, as if it were done already, *Strength with his Arm*, supernatural Deeds performed by his Power, for the Erection of the Kingdom of his Son: and hath often, and will again, *scatter* and defeat *the proud* Opposers of it, by Means of those very *Imaginations of their Hearts*, in which they exult. *The mighty* amongst the Jews and Heathen *shall be put down from their Seat*, and *humble and meek Christians* exalted in their Stead. *They, that hunger and thirst after Righteousness^b*, shall be *filled with spiritual good Things*; and *the Rich*, that rely on the vain and false Treasures of their own Wisdom and Merit, he will convict of being *poor and blind and naked^c*, and so *send them empty away*. He *hath holpen his Servant Israel*, all that by obeying him become his People, as he *promised to our Forefathers, Abraham the Father of the Faithful, and his true Seed*; thus remembering his covenanted Mercy, which shall last for ever. This is the Triumph of the holy Virgin: and every Part of it should be our own likewise. For God *hath regarded our low Estate*, together with Her's, and *magnified us*, and made us

^b Matt. v. 6.^c Rev. iii. 17.

bleſſed. And we ſhould magnify and bleſs Him continually for it.

Inftead of this Hymn, our Prayer Book tells us, may be uſed, and in ſome Places it frequently is, the 98th Pſalm: in which we exhort one another to *ſing unto the Lord a new Song*; Words, denoting, in the Book of *Revelation*^d, Goſpel Praises: and we foretell that *all Lands* ſhall join in it, *with Trumpets and Shawms*, another Inſtrument of Wind-Muſic, which in our Bible is called a Cornet: whence we may conclude, if it needed Proof, that muſical Inſtruments are lawful in Chriſtian Worſhip. This future Time of univerſal Thankſgiving is deſcribed to be, when God ſhall *remember*, that is, ſhall give Evidence that he hath never forgot, *his Mercy and Truth towards the Houſe of Iſrael*, according to the Fleſh; and not only they, but *all the Ends of the World ſhall ſee his Salvation*. No Wonder, that even the irrational and inanimate Parts of Nature are called upon by a lofty Figure of Speech, to celebrate that glorious Day: *the Sea to make a Noiſe, and all that therein is; the Floods to clap their Hands, and the Hills to be joyful together before the Lord*: partly for the preſent Happineſs of that Period, in which

^d v. 9. xiv. 3.

possibly the lowest of God's Works may share; but chiefly for the Approach of the next and concluding Scene of Providence, when he shall come finally, *with Righteousness to judge the World, and the People with Equity.*

After the second Lesson, is appointed another Hymn, used by the ancient Church, in their private Devotions at least; and by the present *Greek* and foreign Reformed, as well as ours and the *Romish*, in their public ones; and called from the *Latin* Beginning of it, *Nunc dimittis*. It expresses the Gratitude of good old *Simeon*, a just Man and devout, as we read in *St. Luke*, and waiting for the Consolation of *Israel*; to whom it was revealed, that he should not die, till he had seen the Lord's Christ. Accordingly he came by the Spirit into the Temple: and when the Parents brought in the Child *Jesus*, he took him up in his Arms, (image to yourselves the Scene, I beg you) and blessed God, and said: Lord, now lettest thou thy Servant depart in Peace, that is, in Comfort; according to thy Word; for mine Eyes have seen thy Salvation, which thou hast prepared to set before the Face of all People. And the following Sentence hath a strong Appearance of being designed by the holy Ghost

* *Luke ii. 25—32.*

to intimate, (whether the Speaker of it perceived the Design or not,) that, contrary to the expected and natural Order of Things, Christ should first *be a Light to lighten the Gentiles*; then afterwards, *the Glory of God's People Israel*. To perceive the Fitness of *Simeon's* Thanksgiving for our Use, it needs only be remembered, and ever should in repeating it, that we also *have seen the Lord's Salvation*. For though we have not yet beheld our Saviour with our bodily Eyes; to that of Faith he is exhibited continually in the Gospel History and Sacraments; we may meet him in his Church, we may converse with him in our private Meditations. And this we should think Happiness enough for us here, whatever else we want or suffer; and be always prepared, and always willing, to *bleſs God*, and *depart in Peace*.

For this Hymn we are allowed to use, and sometimes do, the 67th Psalm: which is a prophetic Prayer, that, through *the Light of God's Countenance*, his gracious Illumination, *the Way* of his Providence and Man's Duty to him *may be known on Earth*, his saving Health, the Means by which he heals and saves Mens Souls, *to all Nations*: who are invited to *rejoice and be glad*, because *he ſhall judge the Folk righteouſly*;

ously; shall govern and reward the People of the World, (for so the Word, *Folk*, signifies, and was not a low Expression formerly,) by the equitable and merciful Rules of Christianity. For *then*, on our doing this, *the Earth shall bring forth her Increase* more plentifully; and *God, even our own God, shall give us his Blessing*, temporal and spiritual; *for Godliness hath Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come*^f.

The former of the two Collects, peculiar to Evening Prayers, is taken from a *Latin* Form, at least 1100 Years old. It begs for the greatest of Blessings here below, that joyful Peace of Mind, which our Saviour promised his Disciples: *Peace I leave with you: my Peace I give unto you: not as the World giveth, give I unto you*^g. And since it cannot be obtained, but by *holy Desires*, good and prudent *Counsels* for the Execution of them, and *just Actions*, done in Consequence of both; so we petition Him, *from whom all these proceed*, to grant it us by Means of them; that *our Hearts being set* by his Grace *to keep his Commandments*, and our Ways *defended* by his Providence *from the Fear of our Enemies*, we may find *the Work of Righteousness*,

^f 1 Tim. iv. 8.^g John xiv. 27.

Peace; and its Effect, Quietness and Assurance for ever^h.

The latter Collect, taken in Part from an Office of the *Greek Church*, prays more particularly for the Safety of the ensuing Night; that God's Favour may shine upon us, and *lighten our Darkness*; that is, protect us, while we are unable to help ourselves, or even to know our Danger. The same Phrase is twice used in the Book of Psalms. *Unto the Godly there ariseth up Light in Darkness*ⁱ. And again, *The Lord shall make my Darkness to be Light*^k.

Next to the Morning and Evening Service in our Prayer-Book stands *the Litany*, or more earnest Supplication for averting God's Judgements, and procuring his Mercy. This Earnestness, it was thought, would be best excited and expressed by the People's interposing frequently to repeat with their own Mouths the solemn Form of *beseeking God to deliver and to bear them*: in which however the Minister is understood to join equally; as the Congregation are in every Particular specified by him. Such Litanies have been used in the Church at least 1400 Years. And they were appointed first for *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*, these being

^h Is. xxxii. 17.

ⁱ Ps. cxii. 4.

^k Ps. xviii. 28.

appropriated to Penitence and Humiliation, and for other Fasts; but not long after for *Sundays* also; there being then the largest Congregation, and most solemn Worship; and our Litany is further directed to be used at such other Times, as the Ordinary shall think proper. Originally it was intended for a distinct Service; to come after the Morning Prayer, as the Rubric of our Liturgy still directs, and before the Office for the Communion, at a proper Distance of Time from each: of which Custom a few Churches preserve still, or did lately, some Remains. But in the rest, Convenience or Inclination hath prevailed to join them all three together: excepting that in some Places there is a Psalm or Anthem between the first and second; and between the second and third almost every where: besides that the latter Part of the Morning Prayer is, most of it, ordered to be omitted, when the Litany is said with it. But still by this close Conjunction several Things may appear improper Repetitions; which, if the Offices were separate, would not. However, as it is, they, who use extempore Prayers in public, have small Right to reproach us on this Head. For doth it not frequently happen, that, during one Assembly of theirs, different

ferent Ministers praying successively, or the same Minister in several Prayers, or perhaps in one only, shall fall into as many Repetitions, as are in the different Parts of our Liturgy, or more? But be that as it will, to these last all Persons would easily be reconciled, if an Interval were placed, in their Minds at least, between the Services; and they would consider each, when it begins, as a new and independent one, just as if it were a fresh Time of meeting together.

The Litany of our Church is not quite the same with any other: but differs very little from those of the Lutherans in *Germany* and *Denmark*. It is larger than the *Greek*; but shorter than the *Roman*, which is half filled up with the Names of Saints invoked: whereas we invoke, first the three Persons of the holy Trinity, separately and jointly; then in a more particular Manner our Redeemer and Mediator, *to whom all Power is given in Heaven and Earth*¹.

Him we pray, that he would *not remember our Offences, nor the Offences of our Forefathers*: which he may not only with Justice permit to intercept from us (as they naturally

¹ Matt. xxviii. 18.

often will) the Blessings, that we might else have inherited; but, if we have imitated wicked Ancestors, instead of taking Warning by them, he may with equal Justice punish us more severely, not indeed than we deserve, but than he would have done otherwise, to prevent the Contagion from growing general and inveterate. Accordingly the second Commandment threatens to *visit the Iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children*: and the Psalmist, according to the Marginal, and perhaps righter Translation, prays as we do: *O remember not against us the Iniquities of them, that were before us* ^m.

The Words, *and be not angry with us for ever*, beg, that the Corrections, which he doth see fit to inflict on us, (for surely we all feel some) he would in Mercy shorten. It is common Language to speak of Afflictions, that last any Time, as if they were endless. And the Expostulation of *David* in the just quoted Psalm, *How long, O Lord? wilt thou be angry for-ever* ⁿ? fully vindicates this Petition, which was doubtless taken from thence.

Having, after this, besought our blessed Lord to deliver us *from all Evil and Mischief* in general, that is, from every Thing bad and hurt-

^m Ps. lxxix. 8.

ⁿ Ver. 5.

ful to us: we deservedly rank *Sin* the foremost of such Things; and pray, first against the original Cause of human Wickedness, *the secret Crafts and open Assaults of the Devil*, and its dreadful Consequences, *God's Wrath and everlasting Damnation*; then against the principal Transgressions of his Laws by Name, subjoining, *and all other deadly Sin*. By this we mean not to deny, that *the just Wages of every Sin is Death*: (though *there are*, as we learn from St. *John*^a, *Sins, not unto Death*, that is comparatively) but only to pray against the peculiarly deadly with peculiar Earnestness. But still, that we may leave out none, we petition lastly to be delivered *from all the Deceits of the World, the Flesh and the Devil*: every Iniquity of every Kind and Degree.

Then we proceed to deprecate the present Sufferings, that our Sins have merited: and intreat our merciful Redeemer to preserve us, both from such, as God's immediate Hand inflicts; *Lightening and Tempest, Plague* properly so called, *Pestilence*, or epidemic Diseases of any Sort, *Famine and sudden Death*; and from such also, as Men's unreasonable Passions produce; whether they be temporal, as *Battle and Mur-*

^a Rom. vi. 23.

^b 1 John v. 16, 17.

der;

der ; or spiritual, as *false Doctrine*, with its Fruits, *Heresy and Schism* ; and what begets them all, *Hardness of Heart* in regard to God's Commands, and *Contempt of his Word*, which Contempt was never so widely spread and infectious, as at present.

We have indeed been blamed for praying against *sudden Death*. But the whole Christian Church hath done it from ancient Time : and Nature and Reason, as well as Religion, direct us to do it. Some, we own, (and we wish they were many,) may be always prepared throughly, in all Respects, to die at any Time. Yet even these may have Cause to wish for Warning of their Death on Account of other Persons. Their Example under the Approach of it will usually be very instructive ; and their dying Advice more than ordinarily beneficial to their Friends, Dependents and Relations : whom also their being taken away at once may shock, to a Degree, for which they would be extremely sorry, whatever they might otherwise chuse for themselves. But, even on their own Account, Christian Humility would surely desire a little Space for completer Preparation. And they, who profess to wish the contrary, are they so very certain, as this implies, that
every

every Part, both of their worldly Affairs and their eternal Concerns, is in the best Condition, to which it can be brought? Or may not possibly this appearing Readiness to die at any Time arise, either from a secret Dread to think of dying at all, or a secret Unbelief, more or less, of what will follow after Death? But whatever a few may imagine best for themselves, justly or unjustly; some previous Notice is undeniably best for the Generality: and common Prayers must be adapted to common Cases; always submitting it to God, to make Exceptions, where he shall think proper.

Having thus expressed, from what Things we desire to be delivered, we earnestly intreat our good and gracious Lord to shew this Mercy to us, *by the Mystery of his holy Incarnation*, and so on: that is, by the Means, and for the Sake, of all that he hath done and suffered for us. The same Manner of Expression is used, not only in common Speech on other Occasions, and in the Liturgies of the ancient Church on this, but in the Scripture itself: where St. Paul beseeches Christians *by the Mercies of God^a, by the Meekness and Gentleness of Christ^b, by his Coming and their Gathering together to him^c*; and

^a Rom. xii. 1.^b 2 Cor. x. 1.^c 2 Thess. ii. 1.

Daniel intercedes with God thus, *According to all thy Righteousness, let thine Anger be turned away: defer not for thine own Sake, O my God*^t.

As we have Need of Protection and Deliverance continually, so we proceed to beg for it, not only *in all Time of our Tribulation*, or Adversity; but *in all Time of our Wealth*, or Prosperity: for when we seem in the most flourishing State, we are often in the most Danger of Evil; and of Sin, the worst Evil. But as *the Hour of Death* is a Season of peculiar Trial and Terror; and *the Day of Judgement* will determine our Lot for ever: we therefore intreat his more especial Grace and Favour at both. The former indeed fixes our Condition at the latter. But still, as the best Life and Death obtain Acquittal and Reward, only through the pardoning Goodness of our Judge; we have great Cause to pray for ourselves, as *St. Paul* did for *Onesiphorus*, *that we may find Mercy of the Lord in that Day*^u.

Having thus represented our own Necessities, we now enlarge the Subject of our Devotions; and *make Supplications*, as the Apostle exhorts, *for all Men*^w: acknowledging, that we are *Sinners*, and therefore unworthy, yet sensible

^t Dan. ix. 16, 19.^u 2 Tim. i. 18.^w 1 Tim. ii. 1.

that we are bound by his Commands, and encouraged by his Promises, to offer up such Requests. And, here, after praying in general for the Catholic Church, we pray in particular for the Head and principal Members, both spiritual and temporal, of that Part of it, to which we belong, and for the whole of God's People of this Land: then we extend our Views further yet; and apply for Blessings, religious and civil, to all other Nations in common with our own; and to all Sorts of Persons amongst Them and ourselves, according to their respective Distresses and Wants, of Soul, Body or outward Circumstances: and lastly conclude our Intercessions with imploring God's *Mercy upon all Men*, whatever their Country, their Religion, their Sins may be; but especially on *our Enemies, Persecutors and Slanderers*, whom we beg he would *forgive*, and in order to it, *turn their Hearts* to a righter Disposition.

Against some of our Requests for others, Objections have been made. One is, that in beseeching God *to succour, help, and comfort all that are in Danger*, we beseech him to assist Malefactors in escaping Justice. But doth not every one understand it of such *Help and Comfort*, as their Case admits, consistently with
common

common Good? Another is, that in praying him *to preserve all that travel by Land or by Water*, we pray for the Preservation of Robbers and Pirates. But surely our Intention is very plain: to beg, that Travellers on their lawful Occasions may be secured from Robbers and Pirates, amongst other Accidents: And if we add in our Minds a further Request, that these Wretches also may be preserved, that is, from attempting any more Injustice and Violence, do we not act a very Christian Part? The same Cavil hath been raised against our praying for God's *Pity to all Prisoners* and *Mercy upon all Men*: Words, which notoriously mean such Pity and Mercy, as he shall judge not to be unfit. And Writers and Speakers never scruple to omit Limitations, which every Reader or Hearer, who is not perverse, will of Course supply.

After going through these Petitions, we endeavour to excite our Desires of a gracious Answer, to as much Fervency as we can, by short, but affectionate Sentences, uttered alternately, in a Sort of pious Emulation, between the Minister and People; and humbly importuning our Redeemer, as the eternal *Son* and spotless *Lamb of God*, the Lord's *Christ*, and the Lord

of Christians, that he would *grant us* his promised *Peace*, which includes all Blessings, and *have Mercy upon us*, in bestowing what we have asked. For this Purpose, it is acknowledged, we repeat several Times the same Words, with very small Variations. But such *Repetitions*, far from *vain*^{*}, are most expressive ones: the natural, the almost constant Language of Earnestness. Hence our Saviour, in his Agony, reiterated the same Words thrice[†]: and *David*, in a Transport of Thanksgiving, even to the six and twentieth Time, as you may see in the 136th Psalm. And these very Repetitions, which we use, are warranted by the ancient Offices of the Christian Church.

Having thus enlivened our Devotion, we proceed to offer up, what deserves the most lively Efforts of it, that perfect Summary of all our Petitions, the *Lord's Prayer*: which, though it occur several Times in the several Services of the Morning, occurs but once in this; and cannot easily be recited too often, provided it be with Attention and Affection.

Hitherto the Litany hath dwelt on no single Subject of Prayer long; but comprehended a surprising Variety of the most needful Articles

* Matt. vi. 7.

† Matt. xxvi. 44.

in a very narrow Compass. The Remainder is of a different Nature. It considers our State here, very justly, as furnishing perpetual Ground of sad Reflection to every thoughtful Mind: and applies itself wholly to express to our heavenly Father the Sentiments required in such a Condition. The seemingly happiest Persons in the World are very inconsiderate, if they do not discern a great deal to mourn over, in others and themselves. Yet at the same Time, the most afflicted are to blame, if they sink under, either what they see or feel. But the common Duty of both is, *in every Thing, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, to make their Requests known unto God*². And therefore this Part of the Litany, though first introduced on Occasion of extraordinary Distresses, lying heavy on *Christendom* 11 or 1200 Years ago, will be too seasonable in every Age, till one of truer Piety and more Tranquillity shall come, than hath yet been known, or is likely soon to take Place.

As the Transgressions, by which we offend God, are the Cause of our Sufferings, these our Supplications begin very properly, with intreating, in Scripture Words, that on humbling

² Phil. iv. 6.

ourselves before him, he would *not deal with us after our Sins, neither reward us after our Iniquities* *. Next to this follows, as is repeated in the Sequel, an Exhortation, *Let us pray*: which may appear somewhat strange, considering that Prayers immediately precede in both Places. But they are short Ejaculations, not continued Forms, like those which follow. And besides, this redoubled Admonition, towards the Conclusion of the Office, will very usefully remind those, who may possibly be growing languid and inattentive, in how important a Work they are engaged. Something there was of this Kind, even in the Heathen Devotions. But in the old Liturgies of Christian Greece, *Let us pray, Let us pray earnestly, Let us pray more earnestly*, often returns.

And the succeeding Prayer, which is of ancient Use in the Western Church, deserves our utmost Earnestness. It begs of Him, who, as the Psalmist assures us, *will not despise a broken and contrite Heart*, (which Phrase I have already explained to you) that *in all our Troubles* he will both *assist us to make our Prayers before him* as we ought, *and graciously bear us*: that so the Designs of our Enemies, visible and in-

* Ps. ciii. 10.

visible,

visible, may be disappointed, and we may feel and express a just Gratitude for our Deliverance. To this the Congregation answer, not as usual, *Amen*: but in a short Form of Scripture Words^b, more strongly expressive of pious Fervency. The Minister instantly returns another Scriptural Address^c to God; pleading with Him, and suggesting to Us, *the noble Works*, done by him for his Church and People in general, and many good Persons in particular, which, if we have not seen with our Eyes, *we have heard with our Ears*: holy Writ and other History hath related them; or *our Fathers have declared them to us*, partly as performed *in their Days*, partly *in the old Time before them*. And since *his Arm is not shortened, that it cannot save*; nor *his Ear become heavy, that it cannot hear*^d; the Congregation again petition him, in the same Words, as before; (only changing one for another, still more pathetic;) that he would *arise, help and deliver them* for the Honour of *his Name*: not for our Merits, but his own glorious Perfections, and the Instruction of his Creatures; that we and all Men may learn to love and praise and serve him. Yet to this we are indispensably bound, even

^b Numb. x. 35. Ps. lxxix. 9. ^c Ps. xlv. 1. ^d Is. lix. 1.

while the painfullest View of our Sorrows and Wants is before our Eyes; and therefore in the Midst of our Supplications we proceed immediately to ascribe that Glory to the sacred Three, which ever hath been, is, and will be, their Due; whether infinite Wisdom allots to Us Prosperity or Adversity. Nor is the Mixture of Doxologies with Complaints less common in Acts of Worship, than it is reasonable. The Book of *Psalms* uses it frequently: the old *Latin* and *Greek* Liturgies use it on this very Occasion: and surely in our private Devotions, even when most afflicted, we still give Praise to God.

But though we own it our Duty to glorify him in the severest Sufferings, if it be his Will that we should undergo them: yet conscious of our Weakness, we go on to beg his Protection against them, or Deliverance of us from them, in mutual Ejaculations of the utmost Warmth: not that moving Expressions will any otherwise incline Him to grant Mercy, than as they fit Us to receive it, by imprinting on us a just Sense of our Dependance; which, if used with Sincerity, they naturally do.

Then we close this Part of the Litany with a more continued Form of Address to our merciful *Father*; composed originally above 1100 Years

Years ago; corrupted indeed afterwards, by intreating God to *turn from us* all Evils for the Sake of the Intercession of his Saints; but reformed in our Liturgy, not only by leaving out that Addition, but by inserting for completer Security a new Clause: *Grant, that in all our Troubles we may put our whole Trust and Confidence in thy Mercy.* And thus it is, that we borrow from the Church of Rome. By this Prayer, so amended, we humbly confess our Infirmities and Unworthiness: yet beg, that notwithstanding both, we may, if God sees it proper, escape the Afflictions, which we fear: but if not, that being still assured of his Goodness to us, we may, with *Job, though he slay us, trust in him*^e: and that for Proof of this, we may as faithfully do our Duty under the heaviest Pressures, as the highest Exaltation; *and evermore serve him in Holiness and Pureness of Living, to his Honour and Glory*; saying with *Job* again, *shall we receive Good at the Hand of God, and shall we not receive Evil*^f? *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the Name of the Lord*^g.

What remains of the Litany is the same with the Conclusion of the Morning and Evening

^e Job xiii. 15.

^f Job ii. 10.

^g Job i. 21.

Prayer : and therefore needs no separate Explanation. May God give us Grace to use these and all our Devotions in so right a Manner, that from praying to him amidst the Troubles and Sorrows of this World, we may be taken, in his good Time, to praise him for ever amidst the Joys of the next, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

S E R M O N XI.

I COR. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.*

ONCE more I intreat your Attention to the Subject, on which I have so often discoursed from these Words. The Part of it, which remains, is the Communion Service. But as that Service is almost every where separated, and very properly, from the preceding one, by the Singing of a Psalm, I would first say a little concerning that much disregarded Branch of Worship.

As Singing is capable of expressing strongly every State, in which the Mind can be, towards every Object; so there never was perhaps any
one

one Nation upon Earth, civilized or barbarous, that did not make this a Part of the Honour paid by them to the God, whom they adored. We find in the Old Testament, it was practised by the *Jews*, before their Law was given, as well as after^a. The Book of *Psalms* consists wholly of religious Songs : and directs the *Saints of the Lord*, to sing unto him, and give Thanks for a Remembrance of his Holiness^b : to sing unto the Honour of his Name, and make his Praise glorious^c ; to sing Praises unto our God, while we have our Being^d. The Prophets foretell, that, in the Gospel Times, Men shall sing for the Majesty of the Lord : and, which brings the Prediction home to Us, they shall cry aloud, and glorify God, in the Isles of the Sea^e. Accordingly St. Paul, not only himself with Silas, even in Prison, sang Praises unto God^f ; but appoints, that all Christians should speak to themselves, and admonish one another, in *Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs*, making Melody with Grace in their Hearts to the Lord^g. And St. James prescribes, Is any one merry ? in a joyful Frame on Account of Blessings received, (for the Word,

^a Exod. xv. 1, &c.^b Ps. xxx. 4.^c Ps. lxxv. 1.^d Ps. cxlvi. 2.^e Is. xxiv. 14, 15.^f Acts xvi. 23,

24, 25.

^g Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.

Mirth,

Mirth, comprehended anciently the most serious Kinds of Gladness) *let him sing Psalms* ^a.

In Pursuance of these Rules, the first Christians made Singing a constant Part of their Worship: as, besides the Ecclesiastical Writers, even a Heathen informs us ⁱ. And the whole Congregation joined in it. Afterwards indeed the Singers by Profession, who had been prudently appointed to lead and direct them, by Degrees usurped the whole Performance ^k. But at the Reformation the People were restored to their Rights: and it made a much quicker Progress for the Pleasure and Comfort, which they found in this Practice: a Circumstance, that ought to endear it to considerate Persons not a little. And as the only Way of singing known in common parochial Churches is by the Metre Psalms; unless we join in that, we intirely omit this Branch of our Duty.

It is very true, the Verse Translation of the Psalms, generally used, is void of Ornament: and hath Expressions, often low and flat, sometimes obsolete. And I wish a better were substituted in its Place. But still in many other Cases, ancient solemn Forms of Words are

^a James v. 13.
7. 2.

ⁱ Plin. l. x. Ep. 97.

^k Bingham iii.

thought venerable, when they are far from elegant: not to say, that the Language of our Forefathers, even where it may seem very uncouth at present, had in its Time frequently full as much Propriety and Beauty, as ours. And several Words of it have been, for that Reason, revived by some of our best modern Authors. But at least the Matter, comprised in the Words, of which I am speaking, is so highly respectable, that the Mind, which is affected only by the Phrase, and not by the Sense, must be a light one indeed.

Again, it is true also, that the Tunes, to which these Psalms are sung, are most of them plain and slow; and the Voices of many in the Assembly unharmonious, and apt to be ill-managed. But Tunes, designed for the Multitude to join in, who have never been regularly instructed, must be plain and slow, and such as they have been accustomed to: for which Purpose the Number should be moderate. Ours are many of them recommended, and as it were consecrated, by long Usage. Confessors for the Protestant Cause have composed them. Martyrs for it have yielded up their dying Breath in them. And several of them are thought, by competent Judges, no Way deficient in real Melody.

Melody. Amongst a Variety of People, Part of them with bad Ears, and most of them with untaught Voices, there will be some, that had better totally abstain; only attending to the Sense, as well as the Sound, of what is uttered by the rest: and others, that should moderate themselves to a prudent Degree of Lowness, till they have learnt, how to exert themselves more properly. But all who are, or can be qualified, and there are few who cannot, should bear such a Part as they are able. It may be done, without in the least disordering the more skilful Singers, who perform the very useful Office of raising and supporting the Tune. This in many Congregations is done by the Organ, the Charity Children, or both. But then the Organ should express the Tunes plainly and distinctly, and make very moderate Intervals between the Lines; the Children should be taught to sing in exact Time and Concert with it; and the whole Congregation should accompany them fervently, yet with Prudence. Taking this Care, though there should still happen to be some little Discords, they would be intirely lost in the general Chorus: the Effect of which would be noble and elevating, if we took rightly into our Thoughts the whole of the

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the Matter, instead of cavilling at minute Particulars.

Consider the Nature of a wild Multitude, in its original savage State, met together at the Call of some vehement ungoverned Passion: how alarming the Concourse, how frightful and horrid the confused and hideous Cries of it must be. Then consider the same Multitude, softened and cultivated by the gentle Influences of Religion, and unanimously assembling at stated Seasons, to sing forth the Praises of the wise and good Parent of all, and echo to each other the Precepts of a rational and mild and beneficent Life here, as the Means of obtaining eternal Felicity hereafter. Can there be a happier Change of Scene, a sweeter and more pleasing View? And suppose the Harmony made by them were ever so little better, than *shouting unto God with the Voice of Triumph*, as the Scripture expresses it, and *making a joyful Noise unto the Rock of their Salvation*¹: yet what worthy and humane and pious Heart is there, that would not be charmed with the Sound, and zealously join in it? We are disposed thus on other Occasions. Amongst our Ancestors, who judged of Propriety as discreetly as our-

¹ Ps. xlvii. 1. xcv. 1.

selves,

selves, (to say no more) the very highest joined humbly and cheerfully with the lowest of their Fellow Christians in the Duty of Psalmody, however artlessly performed. And I intreat you to reflect what it is, either to disdain, or be ashamed, or be too indolent, to lift up our Voices to the Honour of our Maker, when we come into his House professedly to worship him, and he hath commanded that one Part of his Worship shall be this.

But if we will not employ our Lips in the Service, we may still fix our Minds upon it: at least, we should not hinder others from doing either. And particularly we should abstain from giving the bad Example, and the Offence, of indecently holding Conversation at that Time: for which there cannot surely be so pressing an Occasion, but that it may very safely be deferred till after Church, if not altogether omitted.

In the singing of Psalms, different Persons use different Postures. The Prose Psalms, I believe, are and ever have been repeated by all Persons every where, standing. In the Verse Psalms we all stand at the Doxology. And in what goes before, the Reason for doing it is exactly the same, and a very strong one: that the whole is sung to the Glory of God, and of-

ten directly addressed to God. Accordingly we read in the Old Testament, that not only the *Levites* were to *stand every Morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at Even*^m, but that when *they waited with Instruments of Music to praise the Lord, all Israel stood*ⁿ; and again, that they said to the People, *stand up, and bless the Lord your God*^o. We read likewise, that in a Vision of St. *John*, in the Book of Revelation, *a great Multitude, which no Man could number, stood before the Throne, and cried with a loud Voice, Salvation to our God*^p; and in another, that *they who had gotten the Victory over the Beast, stood and sang the Song of Moses, and of the Lamb*^q. Standing therefore, as it is plainly the fittest Posture in itself, is the authorized one also: and were it more uncommon than it is, would be far from a dishonourable Singularity. But still, as very many in most Congregations, either have by long Habit been prejudiced in Favour of sitting, or, though they disapprove the Custom, feel a Difficulty of quitting it, unless every one did: they should not be censured for a Practice by which they mean nothing amiss; but kindly encouraged to an

^m 1 Chron. xxiii. 30.
^p Rev. vii. 9, 10.

ⁿ 2 Chron. vii. 6.
^q Rev. xv. 2, 3.

^o Neh. ix. 5.

Alteration in this Point, which we may thus hope will gradually become general.

And now I go on to the third Morning Office, which follows the Psalm; and is called the *Communion-Service*, and read at the Lord's Table where it can with Convenience, because the holy Communion makes Part of it: though a Part unhappily, now for many Centuries, too often left out in almost all Churches, which it never was originally in any. But however the rest is very proper to be used by itself. Anciently, as well as now, they, who did not stay to receive the Sacrament, were allowed to join in the Beginning of the Office: and from the middle Ages downwards, the Beginning hath been used, even where there was no Sacrament, for a Memorial, which might be useful, of the primitive Practice.

The first Thing we do in it, is repeating the Lord's Prayer: which peculiarly suits this most solemn Act of Christian Worship. Then we proceed, in a very old and excellent Collect, to beg of Him, *unto whom all Hearts be open, so to cleanse the Thoughts of ours, by the Inspiration of his holy Spirit*, by breathing into us with lasting Efficacy good Inclinations and Purposes, *that we may, as perfectly as our present State*

admits, *love* him in our Souls, and *magnify* him in our Words and Lives. Purity of Intention is both in general requisite for approaching God's Altar, and more especially for going through the next Part of the Office aright : in which, after hearing the Ten Commandments rehearsed to us, we pray God to *have Mercy upon us*, and pardon us, so far as we have transgressed either the Letter or the Spirit of them, as explained by our blessed Redeemer, *and incline our Hearts to keep* each of them better for the future. It doth not appear, that this Form of Devotion was ever used in any Liturgy, before our own. But surely, taking the Commandments with the Gospel Interpretation of them, it is a very instructive and edifying one. And they, who think the Confession in the Morning Prayer not particular enough, have sufficient Room here to supply that imagined Defect.

Next follows a Prayer for the King. The primitive Christians, in every public Office, presented a Supplication for their Sovereign. Now in this Office, unless it were put in the Beginning, few in Proportion would join in it when the Sacrament is administered, considering how many return Home without receiving.
And

And therefore it is placed here, just after the Ten Commandments, of which the Authority of the Magistrate is one main Support, as they are of that in return: and we pray the Almighty, that, in *Mercy to his Church, he will so rule the King's Heart*, whom in the Course of his Providence he hath *chosen* to reign over us, and to be his *Servant and Minister to us for Good*; that he may above all Things seek his *Glory*, by maintaining his Laws above-mentioned: and will so rule our *Hearts* likewise, and those of *all his Subjects*, that we may faithfully and humbly obey him: in God, that is, in the Strength of his Grace, and in Subordination, not Contradiction to his supreme Will; and for God, not only for Fear of Man's *Wrath*, but for *Conscience Sake also*.

Then we offer up the Collect for the Day, of which I have spoken already: and after it, read two Portions of Scripture, to which it hath frequently a Reference. One of them is usually taken from the Epistles, the other always from the Gospels. The Epistle hath been thus read, certainly for 1300 Years, but the Gospel much longer. And the very Portions, that we now use, were most of them used on the same Days

^a Rom. xiii. 4.

^b Ver. 5.

1200 Years ago, and perhaps a great deal earlier. The annual Course of them, and of the Collects prefixed to them, began then, as it doth now, not with the Civil Year, or the Entrance of the Sun into this or that Sign; but from the *Advent*, the Approach of the Appearance of Christ, *the Sun of Righteousness*^u. And it was so contrived, that the former Part, from his Birth to his Ascension, should represent to us the principal Articles of his History: the latter, those of our own Duty.

At the reading of the Gospel, the People are directed to stand up, in Honour of Him, whose Life and Words it relates. And there appears no Time, when they did otherwise: or when that Acclamation, *Glory be to thee, O Lord*, was not made, which indeed at present is not prescribed, though it was in the first Edition of *Edward the Sixth's* Liturgy, but omitted afterwards, probably by Accident: for there could be no Objection raised against it.

As in the Morning Prayer, so in the Communion Service, for the same Reason, after reading the Scripture, we recite the Creed: only there we have that of the ancient *Latin* Church, here that of the ancient *Greek*; made

^u Mal. iv. 2.

in the first General Council, held at *Nice*, above 1400 Years ago, and thence called *Nicene*; excepting, that some small Additions were inserted since; all of them, but one^w, about 50 Years after.

In this Creed, we profess ourselves *to believe in one Lord Jesus Christ*, because some had spoken of the human and divine Nature of our Saviour, which they called Jesus and Christ, as two Persons not united. The Words, *Light of Light*, intimating, that his divine Nature is from the Father, as Light is from the Sun, or as one Light without Diminution of itself kindles another, were intended for some imperfect Illustration, (and doubtless a very imperfect one it is, and any other must be,) of his mysterious Generation. The Words, *Lord, and Giver of Life*, ascribed to the Spirit, are not to be joined, as one single Attribute; but are taken from two different Texts of Scripture: in the one of which he is called, according to the marginal Reading, *the Lord the Spirit*^x; and said in the other *to give Life*^y, that is, the spiritual Life of Grace. The Phrase, *who pro-*

^w Consisting of the Words, *and the Son*: which came in some hundreds of Years after. See *Nichols*. ^x 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^y Ver. 6.

ceedeth from the Father and the Son, may signify, either his deriving from the latter, as well as the former, his eternal Subsistence; or, since that hath been disputed between the *Latin* and *Greek* Church, his being sent by both into the Hearts of Men, as the Scripture plainly affirms he is^z.

After the Creed another Psalm is sung: and then the Minister, who is to preach, *moves the People*, by the Direction of the 55th Canon, *to join with him in a short Form of Prayer*. This was more particularly needful in past Ages, when the Sermons were commonly at a different Hour from the Liturgy, as they are still at our Universities. And at whatever Hour they were, great Stress was laid on the Use of this Prayer, for some Time after the Reformation; because, when that took Place, an Acknowledgement of the King's Supremacy, which the *Papists* denied, was very prudently, as Things then stood, inserted into it. And hence it hath continued to our Days, though it is frequently shortened into a Collect and the Lord's Prayer, the Reason for enlarging being now become less. The original Manner of performing this Part of the Preacher's Office was by *bidding*,

^z John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7.

that

that is, inviting and exhorting, the People to pray for the several Particulars, mentioned by him: which they were understood to do, either silently in their Minds, as they went along with him, or by comprehending them all in the Lord's Prayer at last. But in Process of Time, some imagined it better to put the whole into the Shape of a direct Address: others followed their Example, as thinking it a Matter of Indifference: but most have kept to the old Way. And the Intention being the same, neither Custom should give Offence.

The Sermon was anciently an Explanation and Improvement of the Epistle and Gospel, just read before, especially the latter. But now for a long Time a greater Latitude hath been usefully taken.

After the Sermon, one or more of the *Sentences*, or Scripture Injunctions of Bounty and Almsgiving, as also the *Prayer for the whole State of Christ's Church*, are appointed to be read, *if there be no Communion*, before the Congregation be dismissed: neither of these Things being ever unsuitable. And *the first Day of the Week* is recommended in Scripture for Purposes of Charity^a, as well as set apart for *making*

^a 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

Supplications and giving Thanks for all Men^b.

But they are both more peculiarly proper with a View to the Communion: in which Light I shall now consider them.

When we commemorate our Saviour's dying Love to us all, we ought surely to think of expressing our Love to our Brethren: which must be shewn by promoting both their spiritual Good and their temporal. To the former belong those Sentences, which require, that they who are able, should contribute to the Maintenance of a Gospel Ministry, where it wants their Help. And they require it strongly, as you will perceive by reading them. For indeed we seldom or never read them to you, that we may not seem to plead our own Cause: excepting in some few of our Churches, where the primitive Practice, (needful in too many more) of giving Oblations to the Minister, as well as Alms to the poor, at the Sacrament, is preserved or restored. The rest of the Sentences exhort to the latter Duty of relieving the Sick and Needy. What is generally given for them on this Occasion must be considered not as the whole, but a Sample and Earnest of your Charity; I hope, a small one, in Comparison of

^b 1 Tim. ii. 1.

what you give at other Times, and, I trust, is every where faithfully applied as it ought, with most religious and prudent Care.

But as there are few in Proportion, to whom we can do Good with our Substance; and many, that are much above our Alms, yet greatly need our Prayers: we proceed to offer them up *for the whole State of Christ's Church, militant*, that is, carrying on a Warfare against the Enemies of the Soul, *here on Earth*: that all the Members of it may not only have *the Spirit*, the fervent Desire, *of Truth, Unity and Concord*, but may actually agree in *the Truth of God's holy Word*, and live in *Unity and godly Love*. Then we petition more especially for those, whose Stations, as Kings, Magistrates and Clergy, or whose Sufferings of any Kind, require it most: and give Thanks for those, who are got beyond the Reach of Sufferings; begging, that we may *follow their Example*, as far as it was a good one, and share in their Happiness.

The two *Exhortations*, ordered to be used, one or other of them, *when Warning of the Communion is given*, are seldom used, where it returns too frequently and statedly to need Warning. However, they have a great deal in them, that ought to be seriously weighed; but nothing, that

that wants to be explained at present : unless it be the Direction laid down, that they, who *cannot quiet their own Consciences*, as to their spiritual State, and Fitness for the Sacrament, should *open their Grief to some discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, that they may receive the Benefit of Absolution*, if they appear intitled to it, *together with ghostly*, that is, spiritual, *Counsel*. Now here, you see, this private Absolution is not affirmed to be, as it is by the Papists, necessary for all Persons ; but only adviseable for some. It therefore is only a Declaration of the Minister's Judgement, a fallible one indeed, but the proper and appointed one, that if the Person's Case be truly represented, he is pardoned and absolved by our heavenly Father, who alone can forgive Sins. And such Credit only is due to this Declaration, as in other Affairs we allow to authorized Professors and Practitioners of Skill and Probity : whose Opinions we often think it prudent to ask, and happy to have in our Favour : and God forbid, that we should not give you ours, when we are asked it, with as much Fidelity and as much Secrecy, as any Ministers of any Church whatever !

There

There is the less Occasion that I should enlarge on this Office, because I have explained in my Lectures on the Church Catechism, the principal Points, relating to the Lord's Supper. I have shewn you in particular, that the Expression of *eating and drinking Damnation to ourselves*, (which is used by St. Paul in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians**, and from thence taken into the Exhortation at the Communion) means only bringing upon ourselves a Condemnation to some Punishment from God, without determining of what Kind. For the Verses immediately following, (which I shall presently repeat to you) very clearly show that the Word in the Original, which is here translated *Damnation*, ought to have been rendered in this Place, as it is in several others, *Judgement*. Now *Judgement* is a general Term that signifies any Degree of Correction or Punishment in this Life, or the next. That which had been incurred by those unworthy Receivers to whom the Apostle wrote was only Correction in the present Life. For undoubtedly he told them the worst of their Danger, and he tells them of nothing else. The very next Words are: *For this Cause many any weak and sickly among you,*

* Ch. xi. 29.

and

and many sleep, are dead. Then follows, what entirely clears up the Matter: *If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the World.* The Punishment therefore of receiving unworthily will either be extended to another World or confined to this according to the Degree of the Fault: and if we repent sincerely and in Time, it will be forgiven in both. When in the same Exhortation we are required to *judge ourselves* THEN, this by no Means implies, that we need not do it before, but that we should take Care it be now perfected. And when it is said, that we *must above all Things give Thanks to God*, the Meaning is not, that Faith and Repentance are less necessary: but that these being supposed to precede, the principal Point in the Act of communicating is a thankful Remembrance of God's Mercy, disposing us to lay hold of it.

From this last Exhortation we proceed immediately to the first Thing recommended in it, a penitent Confession of our Sins: which the ancient Church made also on the same Occasion. When in this we say, that *the Burthen of them is intolerable*, we mean not always,

that the Sorrow, which we that Instant feel for them, is extreme: for though very sincere, it may be imperfect in its Degree; or though as perfect, as the natural Constitution of our Mind and Body admits, it may not be very passionate and afflicting; or though it were once so, it may now be moderated by a joyful Sense of God's Mercy to us: but we mean, that the Weight, with which our Guilt, if not removed, will finally sit heavy on our Souls, is unspeakably greater, than we shall be able to bear.

After this Confession, the Minister, himself one of the Sinners, who hath joined in it, agreeably to the Duty of his Office, assures the People, that *God hath promised Forgiveness to all, that turn to him* as they ought; and earnestly prays, that they may obtain it: adding express Authorities of Scripture to confirm their Faith and Hope.

Then he exhorts them, thus comforted, to *lift up their Hearts*, and *give Thanks to God*: which Words, with the Answers, and the Substance of all that follows constantly, as far as, *Glory be to thee, O Lord most high*, appear to have been used in the Communion Service 1500 Years ago: and might probably descend from the Apostolic Times. Even the Custom of
appro-

appropriating particular Prefaces to the more considerable Festivals, is 1200 Years old, if not more.

And now, approaching nearer to the Act of receiving, we again solemnly acknowledge our own Unworthiness, as all the old Liturgies did, though not so fully: and pray, *that our sinful Bodies may be made clean by Christ's Body, and our Souls washed through his most precious Blood*: which Expressions have been censured, as if they implied, that each of these, at least the latter of them, (his Blood) had some peculiar Efficacy, of which the other was destitute. But this cannot be intended: because very soon after, the *Preservation of our Bodies and Souls also unto everlasting Life*, is ascribed separately, both to his Body and to his Blood, as it is in Scripture also ^d. Therefore the Distinction made here, was only meant for some Kind of Elegance in Speech: and it much resembles what St. Clement the Roman, whom St. Paul intitles *his Fellow-Labourer* ^e, hath said in his Epistle to the *Corinthians*, that Christ gave *his Flesh for our Flesh, and his Soul for our Souls* ^f.

After this follows the Prayer of Consecration, or setting apart the Bread and Wine to the sa-

^d Heb. x. 10, 19.

^e Phil. iv. 3.

^f Sect. 49.

cred Purpose, in wick they are about to be employed. A Prayer hath been used for that End, at least 1600 Years. And the Mention, which Ours makes of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, from the Words, *who in the same Night that he was betrayed*, to the Conclusion, is in every old Liturgy in the World. The *Romanists* have put into their Prayer of Consecration, Names of Saints, and Commemorations of the Dead, which we have thrown out. And indeed we have left nothing, that so much as needs explaining: unless it may be useful to observe to you, that our Saviour's *one Oblation of himself* is opposed to the various Kinds of Oblations under the Law; and, *once offered*, to the continual Repetition of them: though probably a further View was, to intimate, that he is not, as the Papists pretend, really sacrificed anew in this holy Ordinance.

The first Part of the Words, which the Minister speaks at delivering the Elements, is very ancient: the rest is added by our Church; and the whole is unexceptionable. The Posture of kneeling, which we use, when we receive, is a very proper one. Some indeed think, that the Apostles received in the Posture which they
used

used at Meals, and that we ought to imitate them in this. Now if so; to imitate them strictly, we must not sit, (as these Persons do) but lie all along: for so did the Apostles at Table. But indeed we may rather suppose, that when our Saviour blessed the Bread and Wine, this being an Address to God, both He and they were in some Posture of Adoration: and that they changed it before receiving, is not likely, considering how different that was from a common Meal. Nor does it appear, that any Part of the Christian Church till of late Years, ever used any other Posture than that of kneeling or standing; by each of which they meant to signify Worship. We use the former: but with an express Declaration inserted in all our Prayer Books, that *no Adoration is hereby intended or ought to be done, either to the sacramental Bread and Wine; (for that were Idolatry to be abhorred of all Christians) or to any corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood: for they are in Heaven and not here*. We kneel therefore only to adore the invisible God: and to be in a fit Posture for those Prayers and Praises which can never be more properly offered up to him. And why any Per-

§ Rubric after Communion.

sons

sons should prefer a different Posture we cannot see.

Having communicated, we again repeat, after a long Interval, the Lord's Prayer: For since, *to as many, as truly receive him, he gives Power to become the Sons of God^h*; we may hope we have now strengthened our Title to apply, under that Name, to *Our Father, which is in Heaven, &c.*

Then we *intirely*, that is, with our whole Hearts, *desire him, to accept this our Sacrifice, or Service, of Praise and Thanksgiving*, which we have offered up to him: begging Leave at the same Time to *offer up ourselves, Body and Soul*, as dedicated to His Will: which is the great End of all our Devotions; yet never mentioned in the *Romish Mass-Book*. We pray also once more for the whole Church: and lastly for our Fellow-Communicants, as well as ourselves, that we may be *fulfilled*, that is, filled full, and as the Psalmist expresses it, *abundantly satisfiedⁱ, with God's Grace and Benediction.*

After this, as our blessed Lord sung an Hymn^k with his Disciples after the Passover, (in Imitation of whom the whole Christian

^h John i. 12.

ⁱ Ps. xxxvi. 8.

^k Matt. xxvi. 30.

Church hath used one in commemorating *Our Passover, sacrificed for us*¹;) we use one like-wise, as ancient, in Substance, as the fourth Century at least. It were better indeed, that we sung it: if there did not, alas, often want Numbers, and generally Skill. The Beginning of it is the Song of the holy Angels in St. *Luke*: on which Foundation we proceed to glorify God, and give Thanks to him for his great Glory; meaning, that of his Goodness, Wisdom and Power, displayed in the Work of our Redemption: fervently beseeching *the Son and Lamb of God*, that his Sufferings to take away the Sins of the World, and his sitting at the right Hand of the Majesty on high^m, may bring down Mercy upon us: and acknowledging, that we are all impure, *He only is Holy*; Men and Angels are Servants, *He only is the Lord*; *He only with the Holy Ghost*, united to the Father in Glory unspeakable, is most High above all.

To this Act of Worship we subjoin, (drawing now to a Conclusion,) one or more of those brief, but comprehensive Collects, which are provided for that Purpose. In the first of them,

¹ 1 Cor. v. 7.^m Heb. i. 3.

some have objected against the Phrase, *Chances of this mortal Life*, as implying somewhat irreligious. But our Saviour hath not scrupled to say, *And by Chance there came down a certain Priest* *. Again in the fourth, which is also frequently used before Sermon, some have stumbled at the Expression, *Prevent us, O Lord, in all our Doings*: because preventing most commonly signifies hindering. But the original Meaning, and the true one here is, *Go before us*: which may indeed be either to further us by opening the Way, or to obstruct us by stopping it. But surely it can no more be doubted, which we intend, than what *David* intended, when he said, *Thou shalt prevent him with the Blessings of Goodness* °, and again, *The God of my Mercy shall prevent me* †. The others, I think, have no Difficulties.

What remains is the solemn and affectionate Form of Dismissal: most of which is taken from the Words of holy Writ. The Minister of Christ in pronouncing it, prays, that *the Peace of God, which passeth all Understanding*, that inward Sense of our Maker's Goodness to us, which even now is delightful, beyond the Conception of those, who have not experienced

* Luke x. 31.

° Ps. xxi. 3.

† Ps. lix. 10.

it; and shall hereafter be so heightened, as vastly to exceed the present Conceptions of the best of us; may *keep our Hearts and Minds*^a, our Judgements and Affections, *in the Knowledge and Love of God and his Christ*: and that every *Blessing* of the holy Trinity may be distributed *amongst us, and remain with us always*. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the Sake, &c.

^a Phil. iv. 7.

S E R M O N XII.

I PET. v. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true
Grace of God wherein ye stand.*

THE Happiness of all Creatures depends intirely on their Obedience to his Will, whose sovereign Power created and rules the World. Now the Will of God is made known to us in Part by natural Reason : and they who have no other Law shall be judged by that alone. But as Reason was unable to teach Mankind a great Number of Things very important to be known, and in Fact, did teach most of them but a small Part of what it might have done ; God was mercifully pleased to superadd the Light of Revelation to it, and place us under the Conduct of both jointly. Such

an additional Provision, it might have been hoped, had cleared up all Doubts; but partly the Weakness, partly the Wickedness of Men, hath turned even this Light into Darkness, and made it multiply Disputes instead of ending them. Still we have no Reason to be discouraged; for every upright and considerate Person may after all, with due Care, very easily see his Way before him, clearly enough to walk in in it. But we have great Reason to use this Care, and make such Enquiry amidst the different Paths, which different Persons point out to us, as will give us Cause to be satisfied we chuse the right. Now of all the different Opinions which have risen concerning the Christian Religion, there have been few so remarkable as that which divides this Part of the World into *Papish* and *Protestant*. Those of the former Communion, it seems, think us of the latter quite out of the Way to Salvation, and accordingly are unwearied in persuading, as they have Opportunity, the Members of our Church, especially the lower and more ignorant Part of them, to quit it for theirs. The Necessity of doing this, they insist upon some Times with so much Plausibility, and always with so much Confidence, that I hope you will not think a
few

few Discourses ill employed on a Subject of such very great Importance both to our private Satisfaction and public Security, in refuting the Arguments they usually bring against us, and *testifying that this is the true Grace of God, wherein ye stand.* To proceed regularly in this Matter, I shall

I. Enquire what is the Rule of Christian Faith and Life: and

II. Examine by this Rule the peculiar Doctrines and Practices of the *Romish* Church.

I. I shall enquire what is the Rule of Christian Faith and Life: from whence we are to learn what Things our Religion requires as necessary, and what it forbids as unlawful: for, if we do the one and avoid the other, we are undoubtedly safe. Now as Jesus Christ is the sole *Author of our Faith*^a, those Things, and those alone, which he taught himself, and commissioned his Disciples to teach, are Parts of our Faith. What his Doctrine was we find in no less than four Accounts of his Life and Preaching given in the Gospels. To what Belief his Disciples converted Men, we find in the Acts. What they taught Men after their Conversion, we read in the Epistles. These several

^a Heb. xii. 2.

Books, which make up the New Testament, all Christians allow to contain an original and undoubtedly true Account of our Religion. The only possible Question is, whether they contain a full and clear Account. Now such a one they without Question intended to give, for what could induce them designedly to give any other? Besides, St. *Luke*, in the very Beginning of his Gospel, tells us, that *having a perfect Understanding of those Things which were believed amongst Christians, he had taken in Hand to set forth a Declaration of them*, that those he wrote to might know the Certainty of what they had been instructed in. And St. *John*, in the Conclusion of his, tells us, that though our Saviour did, and doubtless said also, *many Things that were not written in that Book, yet these*, says he, *are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have Life through his Name*^b. This being then their Intention, can we possibly think they failed of it? Two of the Evangelists at least were constantly present at our Saviour's Discourses, the other two heard them either from him, or his immediate Followers, and they had the Promise of his Spirit to bring all Things to

^b John xx. 30, 31.

their

their Remembrance whatsoever he had said unto them. Could they after all forget any Part of this that was material and necessary? That any of them should do so is very strange: much more that they all should. That St. *Luke*, the Companion of the Apostles, and the Writer of their Acts, that he too, in relating what they taught their Converts, should unhappily omit any Thing essential, still adds to the Wonder: and that no one of the many Epistles written to instruct the Churches in their Faith and Duty, should supply this Defect, is beyond all Belief.

But supposing the Scripture ever so perfect in itself, yet the Church of *Rome* objects that it is not clear to us: even to the Learned many Things are hard to be understood; which therefore to the Unlearned must be impossible. Nay sometimes they tell us not one Sentence of it hath a Meaning, which by our own private Judgement we can be certain of. But surely the Apostles were not worse Writers *with* a divine Assistance, than others commonly are *without* it. What they spoke and preached was plain; else they spoke to no Purpose: and why should not the same Things be as plain when they were written down? Some Passages indeed

* John xiv. 26,

might

might to some Persons be difficult, even at first: and more are doubtless become so by Length of Time. But that the Main of the New Testament is intelligible enough cannot be with any Modesty denied. And for the rest, what at first Sight is difficult, may with due Consideration of our own, and Help of others, be made easy; what is obscurely expressed in one Place, may be clearly expressed in another; and what is clearly expressed in no Place, we may safely for that very Reason conclude it is not necessary for us to understand or believe.

But allowing the Scriptures to have been at first sufficiently intelligible, how do we know they are come down to us uncorrupted? I answer, by all the same Arguments which prove the Incorruptness of any other ancient Book in the World, and by this Argument farther, that these Books having many more Copies of them, being much wider dispersed and much more carefully read, and warmly disputed about, than any other whatever; it is in Proportion more incredible that either Chance or Design should alter them in any Thing considerable without Discovery from some Quarter, even were no particular Providence to watch over Writings so worthy of its Care. And accordingly in Fact
amidst

amidst all the various Readings which such a Number of Copies must produce, there is not one that affects the least Article of our Religion. But if ever so faithfully preserved, still how shall the Unlearned know when they are faithfully translated? Why, most Passages all Parties agree in, and on those they disagree about, common Sense, Comparison of other Texts, Consideration of what goes before and after, and consulting, as Opportunity offers, judicious and honest Persons of different Persuasions, will enable any Person to pass a sufficient Judgement, so far as he is concerned to judge, which is right and which is wrong, which is clear and which is doubtful. Indeed there is in general but little Danger of any gross Impositions upon Men being attempted, much less succeeding for any Continuance, in a Land of Knowledge and Freedom, whatever may be or hath been under Popish Tyranny and Darknes. Since therefore the Scriptures contain a full and clear Account of Christianity written by the very Apostles and first Disciples of our Lord himself, and honestly delivered down into our Hands, we have plainly such a Rule for our Faith as all Men in all Cases are ever satisfied with, nor have we any Need to look farther. And yet the farther we do look into other pretended Rules, the better

we shall be satisfied with that we have already. For, let what will be said against Scripture as not being a sufficient Rule, it must be a sufficient one, unless there be some other; and upon a fair Examination it will evidently appear there is no other. The *Romanists* indeed tell us of one which they speak of in very high Terms; and that is the traditionary Doctrine of what they call the Catholic Church. The Apostles, they say, instructed their Converts very diligently in every Article of Faith. Those Converts again, knowing it to be their indispensable Duty, could not fail to instruct with the same Diligence, Ministers their Flocks, Parents their Children, every Christian his Neighbour. And thus, by a continued Succession of teaching, all the Doctrines of Religion are handed down in their Church, they tell us, uncorrupted to this Day. Whoever either added, omitted or changed any Thing, must, they think, by every one round him, be immediately charged with a Mistake; and, if he persisted in it, convicted of a Heresy, whilst the rest were confirmed in the ancient Truth. And therefore to hold what the Church holds is a Rule that can never mislead us. Now it must be owned indeed that our Saviour delivered his Doctrine to the Apostles, and they to all
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the World by Word of Mouth; and this Way of Delivery at first was sufficient, and therefore St. Paul exhorts the *Thessalonians* to hold fast the Traditions he had taught them, whether by Word or by Letter^a. But then in the Nature of Things how long could this last? Suppose but the easiest common Story were to be told from one Person to another, without being written down for only 100 or 200 Years, and let each Person as he received it have never so strict a Charge to tell it in the same Manner: yet, long before the End of that Time, what Security could we possibly have that it was true at first and unaltered still? And you cannot but see there is much less Security that a considerable Number of Doctrines, especially such as compose the *Popish* Creed, should be brought down safe for 1700 Years together, through so many Millions of Hands, that were all liable, through Ignorance, Forgetfulness, and Superstition, to mistake them, or, through Knavery and Design, to alter them. But it will be said, in a Case of such Importance as Religion, Men would be more careful in delivering Truth than in others. Undoubtedly they ought: but who can be secure that they would? It is of equal Importance to be careful in practising it too; yet we all know how this hath

^a 2 Thess. ii. 15.

been neglected in the World: and therefore have Reason to think the other hath been no less so. But whoever made the first Change, they say, must have been immediately discovered. Now so far from this, that Persons make Changes in what they relate without discovering it themselves; Alterations come in by insensible Degrees: one Man leaves out, or varies, or adds one little Circumstance: the next, another: till it grow imperceptibly into a different Thing. In one Age a Doctrine is delivered as a probable Opinion, the following Age speaks of it as certain Truth: and the third advances it into an Article of Faith. Perhaps an Opposition rises upon this, as many have done: some have said such a Doctrine *was* delivered to them, others that it was not: and who can tell whether at last the right Side or the wrong have prevailed? Only this is certain, that which soever prevails, though by a small Majority at first, will use all Means of Art and Power to make it appear an universal Consent at last; and then plead uninterrupted Tradition. But though such Things as these may possibly be done in almost any Age, yet they are easy to be done in such Ages, as were five or six of those, that preceded the Reformation; when, by the Con-
fession

session of their own Historians, both Clergy and Laity were so universally and so monstrously ignorant and vicious, that nothing was too bad for them to do, or too absurd for them to believe. But still they tell us, we Protestants receive it upon the Authority of Tradition, that Scripture is the Word of God: and why can we not as well receive other Things upon the same Authority? I answer, we receive Scripture by no Means upon the Authority of Tradition merely: much less the Tradition of their present Church; but partly on Account of its own Reasonableness, and the Characters of divine Wisdom in it; partly from the Testimony, which one Part of it bears to the other; and lastly upon the written Evidence given us, chiefly indeed by the earliest Christians, but in some Measure also by Jews and Heathens themselves, that the Authors of these Books were the Disciples of our Lord, and the Things said by them true. But then to tell us, that because we receive Scripture upon this Evidence, we must therefore receive a long List of Doctrines upon mere Tradition after 17 Ages, is to affirm that the Memory of Things may be as well preserved for ever by general Rumour and Hearsay as by authentic Records. But here they

they plead that the Tradition which they depend on, is not altogether unwritten, but partly recorded by the ancient Fathers of the Church. To this we answer, that we acknowledge truly ancient Writers, in Matters where they all agree, to be a very valuable Evidence of the Faith, though at the same Time a fallible one. And we can prove undeniably, that these Writers, in Proportion as they lived near the Days of the Apostles, were of our Faith, not theirs. But as this is a Proof in our Favour that few Persons are capable of entering into, so we have happily a much shorter. For if Antiquity be an Argument; the greater the Antiquity, the stronger the Argument: and therefore the Authority of the Bible, for this, as well as many other Reasons, is the strongest of all. An original Account is always to be depended on in the first Place. Such others, as come a little after, in Point of Time, may be of considerable Use to illustrate and confirm the former: but, wherever they appear to contradict it, must be rejected without Scruple. And those which come a great deal after, such as the Church of *Rome* chiefly depends on, deserve little or no Credit. The Spirit of God therefore, seeing the Need there would be of it, inspired the

Apostles

Apostles and Evangelists to deliver a full and clear Rule of Faith to all Posterity in the New Testament: certainly not that this might be interpreted afterwards by Tradition into whatever Sense Men pleased; (for then Tradition alone had done as well or better without it) but that Tradition, as often as it went wrong, might be rectified by this. Had not Christianity been committed in the earliest Ages to writing; long before this Time, in all Probability, there had been scarce one Doctrine of it left, which we could have been secure was genuine. And though Tradition hath doubtless been preserved, by having some Regard to Scripture, from degenerating and varying near so much as it would else; yet, for Want of having a sufficient Regard to it, first needless, then uncertain, then false and pernicious, Articles of Belief have crept in among Christians: the very Steps of whose Entry, for the most Part, we can trace. The Faith of the first Ages changed, by little and little every Age after, and still for the worse; till at Length the Church of *Rome*, about 200 Years ago, at the Council of *Trent*, when they were called upon to reform these Abuses, most shamefully chose to establish them under the venerable Name of primitive Tradition, and

condemn all who will not receive them with the same Regard as Scripture itself. Just as in our Saviour's Time it was among the *Jews*; who asked, *why walk not thy Disciples according to the Tradition of the Elders? And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own Tradition*. And just as St. Paul had foretold it would happen among Christians. *Beware, lest any Man spoil you through vain Deceit, after the Tradition of Men, and not after Christ*. But here they reply, that, let this Passage be designed against whom it will, it cannot possibly fall on them. For, however uncertain Tradition might become of itself in Process of Time, and however difficult it may be for private Persons to judge of Doctrines by it, yet the Judgement of the Catholic Church in these Points is infallible, and theirs is that Catholic Church. Now that the Church is infallible, they sometimes attempt to prove from Reason. Making it so was the only Way to end Disputes, and therefore God being wise and good, *must* have made it so. But certainly a much more effectual Way of preventing Disputes and Errors had been to have made every single Man infallible; and yet

• Mark vii. 5, 9.

r Col. ii. 8.

God

God hath not done this. It might therefore be more modest for them to let him show his Wisdom and Goodness in what Way he pleases. The *Jewish Church*, we know, was not infallible. For they denied their Saviour, and it was by following Tradition that they came to do it. How then does it appear that the Christian must be more infallible? Why, they have Texts of Scripture to prove this. But if, as they commonly tell us, the Scripture can neither be proved nor understood but by the infallible Authority of the Church; how can the infallible Authority of the Church be proved or understood by Scripture? However let us hear these Texts. Our Saviour told his Apostles, that the Comforter *should come and lead them into all Truth*¹. But perhaps this was said only to the Apostles: and, had it been said to them and their Successors, or, which is still a different Thing, to the whole Church; yet so St. *John*² tells all Believers, *they have an Unction from the holy one, and know all Things*; that is, Things necessary: not that they were not capable of mistaking, but that, with due Care, they might avoid it if they would. Again he promised his Disciples, that *he would be with them to the End*

¹ John xvi. 13.² 1 John ii. 20.

*of the World*¹. And so he hath promised every single Christian to be *with them and dwell in them*²: yet this does not hinder but they may both misunderstand and even renounce Christianity if they please. But he declares also, that *the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church*³. But *the Gates of Hell*, or, as it might be translated, of the invisible World, mean nothing else than the Power of Death, *i. e.* the Terror of Persecution, as the Learned well know. And it can never follow, that because Persecution shall not destroy the Church, Error shall not corrupt it. Or were this Expression, the *Gates of Hell*, to comprehend Error, it must at least equally comprehend Sin. And therefore, as this Promise does not hinder the Church universal from being more or less defiled by Sin, so neither from being deformed by Error. And the most our Saviour meant to promise, is, that neither shall totally abolish, though, through the Faults of Men, both may greatly pollute it. They plead farther, that St. Paul says, *the Church of God is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth*⁴: but they know at the same Time, that this Passage of St. Paul is fairly capable of

¹ Matt. xxviii. 20.
18.

² 1 Tim. iii. 15.

³ 2 Cor. vi. 16.

⁴ Matt. xvi.

two other Translations, either of which turns it to a different Sense. Or were this the only Sense; we acknowledge the Church was then, and ought always to be, and in some Measure always is, a Pillar and Support of Truth; and so in his Proportion is every Believer: and therefore of every single good Christian our Saviour says, in the *Revelation* ^a, *I will make him a Pillar in the Temple of my God.* But then it does not follow from hence, that any one Christian, or the Majority of Christians, so support the Truth, as that they do and ever will profess it all, without any Mixture of Error: and unless this be done, there is no Infallibility. But they argue farther, that our Saviour directs ^b, *If a Man neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.* But what is he there speaking of? Let us read the Context. *If thy Brother shall trespass against thee, go, and tell him his Fault between him and thee alone. If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church. If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.* That is, if a Man have done you an Injury, first admonish him

^a Rev. iii. 12.

^b Matt. xviii. 17.

privately of it. If that avail not, tell the Church: not the universal Church sure throughout all the World, but the particular one you both belong to. And if he will not reform upon their Reproof, look on him no longer as a true Christian, but an ill Man. Here therefore is not one Word said about disobeying the Determination of the Catholic Church concerning a disputed Doctrine: but about slighting the Admonition of a particular Church concerning a known Sin, and particular Churches are owned to be fallible.

Again, they say it is an Article of our Creed, that we *believe in the Catholic Church*. But then they know the Meaning of this is not that we believe whatever this Church, or any who please to call themselves so, shall at any Time assert. But, as believing in the Resurrection of the Body, is only believing that such a Resurrection shall be, so believing in the Catholic Church is only believing that such a Church is: that Christ hath united his Followers into one regular Society or Body, of which himself is the Head: which Society or Church is therefore called Catholic or Universal, because it consists of all Nations; whereas the Jewish Church was not Catholic, but particular,

ticular, consisting only of one Nation. But whether this Church be infallible or not, the Creed says nothing. They that can lay a Stress on such wretched Arguments as these, how would they have triumphed had the same Things been said of their Church, that are said of the Jewish Church? *If there arise a Matter too hard for thee in Judgement, says Moses, thou shalt come unto the Priests the Levites, that shall be in those Days, and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall inform thee; thou shalt not decline from the Sentence that they shall show thee, to the right Hand nor to the left; for by their Word shall every Controversy be tried.* The Scribes and Pharisees, says our Saviour, *sit in Moses' Seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do.* Now if these very strong Expressions did not prove that Church infallible, (as certainly they do not; for then Christianity which they rejected would not be true) how can much weaker Expressions prove any other to be so? But they who will needs have the Church to be infallible, and the Rule of our Faith instead of Scripture; what Part of it do they make the Infallibility reside in? For unless that be clearly known, we are

* Deut. xvii. 8, &c.

* Deut. xxi. 5.

* Matt. xxiii. 3.

never the better for it; but instead of the same Rule of Faith, every different Opinion about this Matter will produce a different Rule of Faith. And it is a Matter, in which the Opinions of the *Romanists* differ greatly. Many of them say the Pope is infallible, and he himself claims to be so. But then some think he is so in Matters of Faith only, some in Matters of Fact too. In most Popish Countries it would be looked upon as Heresy to deny him this Privilege; in others as great Weakness to ascribe it to him. For a large Part of them say nothing is infallible under a general Council, regularly called. But then they have so many different Opinions about what makes a Council general, and what Call of one is regular, that some of them reckon at least eighteen general Councils, and some at most but seven or eight: and indeed they might very justly question whether, strictly speaking, there was ever one such in the World. But farther: which of the Decrees and Canons of these Councils, amongst the infinite Forgeries there have been, are genuine, and which not, here again is an endless Controversy; and another as endless what the Meaning of some of the most important ones of them is. In Consequence of this they differ and dispute,

pute, and have done for Ages, (as united as they would seem to be) not only about such silly Questions, as whether the *Virgin Mary* was conceived in original Sin or not, (and yet about this they were calling one another Heretics for 300 Years, and their general Councils, with all their Infallibility, have not dared to determine the Matter to this Day;) but they quarrel equally about Things of the greatest Moment. To give but one Instance of many: whether a King may, for Heresy or Disobedience to the Church, be deposed, and his Subjects discharged of their Allegiance, is a Question of as much Weight as can well be put. The Popes and great Part of their Church for 600 Years have held they might; and have practised accordingly, as most Nations in their Turns have felt. But what Tradition hath taught, and general Councils have decreed on this Point, is so various and contradictory, that it would take a Man's Life almost to inquire into it. So that some *Popish* Writers speak of the Affirmative of this Question as an Article of Faith; and some as a most impious Error. One or the other must be impious, undoubtedly. Which then are the Heretics? and what is their Infallibility good for, that either cannot,

or will not, decide Questions of such Importance to human Society as this? But to proceed: Some of that Communion allow not even Councils to be infallible, and account no Doctrine fundamental, unless the whole Body of the Roman Church hath received it as such. And how shall the ignorant know with Certainty when they have all received it, and in what Sense they have received it? But why the whole Body of the Roman Church? What Claim hath she of being always in the right more than the Churches of Greece, of Asia, or Ethiopia, who differ from her, as well as we, in many Things, and allow her no such Privilege? Nor, which is more, did St. Paul know of any she had in the least: but in his Epistle to the Church of Rome, bids her *not to be high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the Jews, take heed, lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore, the Goodness and Severity of God: On them—Severity: but towards thee, Goodness: if thou continue in his Goodness, otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.* Strange Treatment, sure, of an infallible Church! Some Persons therefore have held Infallibility to reside not in the Church of Rome particularly, but in the whole Body of Christians considered as one, which indeed is the

the only true Catholic, or Universal Church. But the whole Body of Christians, in the Nature of Things, can never meet: and, were it as easy, as it is difficult, to collect their several Opinions, what one Point should we find them all in all Ages agree in as necessary, besides those general Doctrines of Christianity, that are on every Hand allowed to be clearly contained in Scripture? Which Way soever then we seek for a Rule of Faith, to Scripture-Doctrine we must return: and therefore the best Way is, never to depart from it.

But here some of the *Romanists* (for they differ about it) will say we wrong them. They admit Scripture for the Rule of Faith. But do they admit it for the only one? This they dare not say. Or, if they did, will they allow us, when we have this Rule, to know what it means? No, we must never understand the least Part of it, though ever so plain, in any different Sense from what the Church is pleased to appoint. What then is this but mocking Mankind, and giving with one Hand, what they immediately take away with the other? But we, they say, are in a pitiable Condition, that, having only the dead Letter of Scripture to go by, and no living Guide or Judge to direct us in the Interpretation
of

of it, as they have; Controversies are always rising among us, and can never be decided. To this we answer, that Controversies are what they themselves, even with Persecution to help them, can neither prevent or end any more than we. And in Matters of Property indeed, some Decision, right or wrong, must be made. Society could not subsist without it: but what Need of an infallible Decision in Matters of Faith? Why is it not sufficient that every Man determine for himself as well as he can in this World; and that God, the only infallible Judge, will determine with Equity concerning us all in the next? But the Generality of People, they say, are incapable of judging for themselves. Yet the New Testament supposes them both capable of it, and bound to it; and accordingly requires them not only to *try the Spirits*, the Pretences to Infallibility, *whether they be of God*^a, but to *prove all Things, and hold fast that which is good*^b. But were this otherwise; if they are incapable of judging, why do you persuade them to change their Judgement? Let them alone in the Way they are in. But if they have Judgement enough to determine whether the Catholic Church be infallible, whether the

^a 1 John iv. 1.^b 1 Thess. v. 21.

Church of *Rome* be the Catholic Church, whether this Infallibility be in Pope or Council, which Decrees of either are genuine, and what is the true Meaning of those Decrees; all which Things they must determine before the Infallibility of the Church can be any Guide to them: if I say every plain Man hath Ability enough for such Points as these, why hath he not Ability enough in other Cases, to understand common Sense and plain Scripture: to judge whether Transubstantiation, for Instance, be not contrary to the one, and Image Worship to the other? The *Romanists* themselves own, that Men must use their Eyes to find this Guide: why then must they afterwards put them out to follow him? Especially considering that the only Rule, which above ninety-nine Parts in a Hundred of their Communion have to follow, is not the Doctrine of Councils and Popes even were they infallible: (for of these it is infinitely harder to know any Thing than of Scripture,) but merely what a few Priests, and private Writers tell them; and so at last, all the Pretence to being directed by Infallibility, ends in being led blindfold by Men, confessedly as fallible as themselves. But all Christians are

com-

commanded, they say, to *obey them that have the Rule over them in the Lord* *. And it is true, the teaching of the Ministers of the Gospel ought to be attended upon: their Doctrine followed in all clear Cases, and their Judgement respected even in doubtful ones. But still we are no more bound to follow our spiritual Guides into Opinions plainly false, or Practices plainly sinful, than to follow a common Guide down a Precipice, or into the Sea, let our own Knowledge of the Way be ever so little, or the other's Pretences to infallible Skill in it ever so great. The Rule therefore for the unlearned and ignorant in Religion is this. Let each Man improve his own Judgement and increase his own Knowledge as much as he can: and be fully assured that God will expect no more. In Matters, for which he must rely on Authority, let him rely on the Authority of that Church which God's Providence hath placed him under, rather than another which he hath nothing to do with; and trust those, who, by encouraging free Inquiry, appear to love Truth, rather than such as, by requiring all their Doctrines to be implicitly obeyed, seem conscious that they will not bear to be fairly tried. But never let

* Heb. xiii. 17.

him

him prefer any Authority before that which is the highest of all Authority, the written Word of God. This therefore let us all carefully study, and not doubt but that whatever Things in it are necessary to be believed, are easy to be understood. This let us firmly rely on, and trust to its Truth, when it declares itself *able to make us wise unto Salvation, perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good Works*^x. Let others build on Fathers and Popes, on Traditions and Councils, what they will : let us continue firm, as we are, *on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets; Jesus Christ being the chief Corner Stone*^y.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 13—17.^y Eph. ii. 20.

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S E R M O N XH

S E R M O N XIII.

1 PET. v. 12.

— *Exhorting and testifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye stand.*

THE general Rule of Conduct for Men to go by is Reason : contrary to what this plainly teaches, we neither can nor ought to believe ; but beyond what it teaches, on sufficient Authority, we justly may. Persuasion founded on Authority is called Faith : and that which is founded on the Authority of our blessed Lord, Christian Faith.

Now the Rule of this Faith, the only Means by which we, who live so many Ages after him, can learn with Certainty what Things he hath required as necessary, and what he hath forbidden as unlawful, I have proved to be the holy Scriptures. For these, which confessedly give us a true Account of Christianity, do also,

as I have shown to you, give us a full and sufficiently clear Account of it: and there is none whatever besides that can be equally depended on. Other Antiquity compared with that of Scripture is modern: Tradition in its own Nature soon grows uncertain: and Infallibility is no where to be found upon Earth. The only Thing then we have to rely on in Christianity, is the written Word of God. Whatever this forbids is sinful: whatever it requires as a Condition of Salvation is necessary: whatever it does not so require, is not necessary. By these Rules therefore of Reason and Scripture, let us now proceed, as was proposed in the second Place, to try the chief of those Doctrines which distinguish the Church of *Rome* from ours.

To begin with that which is naturally first, the Object of Worship. We worship God, and pray to him through the Mediation of Jesus Christ. This they acknowledge to be right. The Saints in Heaven we love and honour as Members of the same mystical Body with ourselves. The holy Angels we reverence as the Ministers of the Divine Will. But as for praying to either, there being no Argument for it in Reason, nor Precept in Scripture, nor indeed Example in Antiquity for at least 300 Years
after

after Scripture, it surely cannot be a Thing necessary. Letting it alone is undoubtedly safe: whether practising it be so, the Church of *Rome* would do well to consider. They tell us indeed that they only beg the Prayers of the Saints in Heaven, as we do those of good Persons on Earth. And were this true; (as I shall prove it is not) we desire our Fellow Christians on Earth to pray for us because we know they hear our Desires: and surely it is Reason enough not to ask those in Heaven to do it, because we do not know they hear us, nor have the least Cause to think they do. For Scripture, which alone could tell us so, hath told us no such Thing. But besides, if we can at all understand Scripture, it hath expressly forbidden all Applications to the Inhabitants of the invisible World, excepting the Supreme Being. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, says Moses, and him only shalt thou serve*^a. *There is one God and one Mediator, says St. Paul, between God and Men: the Man Christ Jesus*^b. Accordingly we find, that the Angel which appeared to St. *John* in the *Revelation*, forbids any religious Honour to be paid him, even when present. *See thou do it not: I am thy Fellow Servant: worship*

^a Matt. iv. 10.^b 1 Tim. ii. 5.

God^c. And when some amongst the *Colossians* had affected unjustifiable Practices of this Kind, St. Paul censures them as being in a very dangerous Error. *Let no Man beguile you of your Reward in a voluntary Humility and worshipping of Angels, intruding into those Things which he hath not seen^d*. Yet does the Church of Rome intrude so much farther as to pay undue Worship to Beings far below Angels: not only to the Saints in Heaven, but to some who were so wicked on Earth, that there is great Reason to fear they are in Hell, and to others that are mere Fictions of their own Imaginations, and never were at all. For the Sake of these, and through their Merits, they desire in their public and authorized Prayers, God's Mercy, sometimes quite omitting to mention the Merits of Christ, and sometimes joining his and theirs together. Farther than this, they directly pray to them, in the House of God, and in the same Posture in which they pray to God; and that not only to intercede with him for them, but, in so many Words, that they themselves would bestow Grace and Mercy upon them, would forgive the Guilt of their Sins, deliver them from Hell, and grant them a Place in Heaven. What Pretence is there now in

^c Rev. xix. 10. xxii. 9.

^d Col. ii. 18.

Christianity for such Things as these? and what doth this tend to, but making the Ignorant, especially, think their favourite Saint can do every Thing for them, right or wrong? To Him therefore they recommend themselves, not by a religious Life, but by flattering Addresses and costly Presents: on His Intercession they often depend much more than on our blessed Saviour's; and being secure, as they think, of the Favour of these Courtiers of Heaven, pay little Regard to the King of it. Thus is the Intent of Religion destroyed, and the Heathen Multitude of Deities brought silently back into Christianity. But above all, their Worship of the Virgin *Mary* is very remarkable. We honour her Memory as a Person whom *he that is mighty hath peculiarly magnified*, and whom *all Generations shall call blessed*°. But They address her in such Terms as follow: *Empress of Heaven; Queen of Angels and Men; through whom, after God, the whole Earth liveth; Mother of Mercy; the Fountain of Grace and Salvation; the only Hope of Sinners: Who ever trusted in thee, and was confounded? To thee I commit all my Hope, and all my Comfort: under thy Defence is my Refuge; make Haste to help me in all*

° Luke i. 48, 49.

Things which I shall either do or think every Moment of my Life, loose the Bonds of the guilty, enlighten the Eyes of the blind, free us from all Sin, and drive away from us all Evil: grant us to escape eternal Damnation, and cause the Glory of Paradise to be bestowed on us. What Authority or what Excuse is there now for such Expressions as these? And yet every one of them I have myself collected partly out of their public Offices, partly from others of their authorized and approved Books of Devotion. Formerly in their very Mass Book they went yet farther; And begged her, by Virtue of her parental Authority, to command of her Son what they wanted. But to this very Day, in another Office, they intimate the same Thing, by exhorting her that *she would shew herself to be his Mother.* And the better to make sure of her doing so, they apply to St. *Joachim*, who, they say, was her Father, though indeed it is not certainly known at all who her Father was; much less whether he was Saint or Sinner: However, they apply to St. *Joachim* and tell him, that *as his Daughter can possibly deny him nothing, it is in his Power to do every Thing he will for them.* This, you see, is being very artful in making Interest; only it is more Art than

than is necessary. For since we are both permitted and appointed to approach God through Christ directly, who, we are certain, both doth hear and will help us, we shall prejudice, instead of benefiting our Cause, by making underhand Applications to other Persons, who perhaps never come to know of our Petitions, and, if they do, are displeased at them; or, if they were not, can be in Comparison of little Use to us.

Yet to judge by the Practice of the *Romish* Church, who would not think that the whole New Testament were filled with Precepts for the Worship of the Saints, especially the blessed Virgin? Whereas, even in the *Gospels* she is but seldom and occasionally mentioned; our Saviour seeming on Purpose to take less Notice of her, as if he foresaw what Advantages taking more would give to the Extravagancies of after Times. In the *Acts* she is just mentioned once. In the *Epistles* and *Revelation* not at all. Yet these are not half the monstrous Things that the *Romanists* are guilty of about her. They have invented a Fable of her Body being taken up into Heaven, and appointed a solemn Festival in Honour of it. They have instituted a Form of Devotion called the *Rosary*, in which ten

Addressees are made to her, for one to God; and successive Popes have granted large Indulgences and Blessings to all that shall say it. Then their private Writers about her have gone incredible Lengths. One of their Cardinals, *Bonaventure*, by putting her Name instead of God's, and some other necessary Alterations, hath applied the whole Book of *Psalms* to her. In the same Manner he hath altered the *Te Deum*. *We praise thee, O Mary, we acknowledge thee to be the Lady; and so in the other Hymns of the Church.* Nay, he hath made a Creed for her in Imitation of *St. Athanasius's*. *Whoever will be saved, it is necessary that he hold the true Faith concerning Mary; which except a Man keep whole and undefiled, he shall perish everlastingly.* Now if their Church do really disapprove these Things, why do they never censure them? Why is this very Man canonized for a Saint, whilst we are condemned as Heretics? For not content with thinking this Kind of Worship lawful, they pronounce accursed whoever shall think otherwise.

Another Thing we differ in, is this: They make Pictures of God the Father under the Likeness of a venerable old Man. They make Images of Christ and of his Saints, after their

own Fancy. Before these Images, and even that of his Cross, they kneel down and prostrate themselves: to these they lift up their Eyes, and in that Posture pray. The least Appearance of Command, or even the Allowance, of such Practices in Scripture they pretend not; and yet against those who disallow them, they thunder out Anathemas. Now as to Pictures of the Father Almighty, *whom no Man either hath seen, or can see*^f; all visible Figures must represent him such as he is not, must lead the Ignorant into low and mean Ideas of him, and give those of better Abilities, from a Contempt of such Representation, a Contempt of the Religion that uses them. Anciently the *Heathens* themselves had no Images of God; and a very learned *Heathen* observes, that if they had never had any, their Worship would have been the purer; for the Inventors of these Things, says he, lessened among Men the Reverence of the Divine Nature, and introduced Errors concerning it^g. The *Jews*, though the Old Testament figuratively expresses, in Words, the Power and Attributes of God by Parts of the human Form, were yet most strictly forbidden all sen-

^f 1 Tim. vi. 16. ^g Varro ap. S. Aug. de Civ. Dei. l. 4. c. 31. where he says they had none for 170 Years. But *Tarquinius Priscus* introduced them. See *Tenison* on Idol. p. 59.

fible Representations of him under any Form. *Take good Heed unto yourselves, says Moses, for ye saw no Manner of Similitude on the Day that the Lord spoke to you in Horeb; lest ye corrupt yourselves, lest ye forget the Covenant of the Lord your God, and make the Similitude of any Figure; for the Lord thy God is a consuming Fire, even a jealous God*^b. Accordingly we find, that when they had made a Golden Image, tho' it was expressly designed in honour of that God who brought them out of *Egypt*, it was notwithstanding punished as Idolatry. And far from allowing to Christians, what was then forbidden the *Jews*, St. *Paul* most severely condemns it in the very Heathens, that *when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their Imaginations, and changed the Glory of the incorruptible God, into an Image made like to corruptible Man*ⁱ. Yet how near doth this approach to what the Church of *Rome* doth now, in making Pictures of God the Father! Our blessed Saviour indeed, having taken on him human Nature, is capable of being represented in a human Form. But, as all such Representations must be imaginary ones, so they are useless ones too: the Memorial of himself, which

^b Deut. iv. 15—24.ⁱ Rom. i. 21, 23.

he hath appointed in the Sacrament, we may be assured is sufficient to all good Purposes; and these other Memorials have always produced absurd and wicked Superstitions. As for the Images of the Saints, it is sufficient to say, that there being no Pretence for worshipping the Saints themselves, there is yet less Pretence for worshipping these Representations of them. But here the Church of *Rome* will say we wrong them: they do not worship Images, but only Christ and his Saints by these Images. But indeed it is they who wrong themselves then. For not a few of their own Writers^k frankly own they do worship Images, and with the same Degree of Worship that they pay to the Persons whose Images they are. And for the Cross particularly, in their public Offices, they expressly declare themselves to adore it, and in plain Words, petition it in one of their Hymns, *to give Increase of Grace to the Righteous, and Pardon to the Guilty*. This they say is a poetical Licence; and truly, in so serious a Thing as Worship, no small one. But farther: had

^k *Aquinas*, &c. See *Trapp*. Ch. of *England* defended, p. 219. They put in the *Index Exp.* those Passages in Marginal Notes and Indexes, that say the contrary. See Instances, *ib.* p. 235. They are to be worshipped, says *Bellarmino*, *ita ut ipsæ terminent venerationem, ut in se considerantur & non solum ut vicem gerunt exemplaris*, *Bellarmin. de Imag.* 1, ii, §. 21. *ap. Virr. in Is.* xlii. 20.

they

they no Regard to the Image, but only to the Person represented, why is an Image in one Place looked upon to have so much more Power and Virtue, than an Image of the same Person in another Place? Why hath that of our Lady of *Loretto*, for Instance, so much more Honour done it, than that of our Lady any where else? We own the Council of *Trent* does give a Caution, that no Divinity be ascribed to Images, nor any Trust put in them: And the Heathen gave the like Caution often with Respect to theirs: but this never hinders the Scripture from condemning them as Idolaters. And the Reason is, that such Cautions never are, or can be observed by the Multitude. Place sensible Objects before them to direct their Worship to: and in those Objects their Worship will terminate. This the primitive Christians saw too plainly in the Heathens, ever to think of imitating them. Accordingly neither Images nor Pictures were allowed in Churches for near 400 Years. And when, after being more than once condemned, they came to be allowed, no Honour was intended to be paid to them. On the contrary, when it began to be paid, which indeed was not long, it was severely censured, and particularly in the eighth Century, by above 300 Bishops,

shops, assembled in Council at *Constantinople*. But about thirty Years after, the second Council of *Nice*, (so ill did Councils agree) established it. Yet even this Council held Representations of *God* to be unlawful. And all the Western Countries, except *Italy*, under the Pope's immediate Direction, continued to condemn the *Worship* of *all* Representations, for some Ages afterwards. But by Degrees it first became general; and then so grossly scandalous, that the Church of *Rome*, it seems, hath judged it the wisest Way to leave the second Commandment, which too plainly forbids these Things, out of their smaller Books of Devotion, under the absurd Pretence of its being only a Part, I suppose an insignificant one, of the first: though, since they have been charged with this, they have thought fit in some of them, but not in all, to restore it again. And here let us quit the Article of Image-Worship, with the Psalmist's Remark upon it. *They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord*¹.

But there still remains another Object of *Papist* Worship, the Sacramental Bread and Wine. For they have made it an Article of Faith, that

¹ Pf. cxv. 8, 9.

the Substance of these is, by the Words of Consecration, intirely changed into the Substance of the living Body and Blood of Christ; which Change therefore, they call *Transubstantiation*. Now, were this really the Body of Christ, 'tis allowed we have no Command to worship it under this Disguise, and therefore commit no Sin in letting such Worship alone. But if it be really not so, they own themselves to pay that Honour to a Bit of Bread, which belongs only to the eternal Son of God. And surely one should think it a Question easily decided, whether a small Wafer, which is the Bread they use on these Occasions, be the Body of a Man, and whether Wine in a Cup be Blood. Almost every one of our Senses will tell us it is not: And though, in some hasty or distant Appearances of Things, our Senses may be deceived, yet, if, where there is all possible Opportunity of examining the Matter, we cannot be sure of what our own Eyes and our own Feeling, our Smelling and Tasting, all inform us of, then we can be sure of nothing. 'Tis only by such Evidence that we know any Thing in this World: 'tis by no other that we know we have a Revelation from God, and that this Sacrament is appointed in

it. If therefore we are not to believe our Senses, how are we to believe any Thing at all? But indeed what they tell us in this Case, is as contrary to all Reason, as it is to all Sense. That a human Body in its full Dimensions should be contained in the Space of an Inch or two, looks as like a Contradiction as any Thing well can do: that the Substance of Bread should not be in the Sacrament, where they own all the Properties of Bread are, and that the Substance of Flesh should be there, and not one of the Properties of it appear, is very monstrous; and that the very same Body of Christ, which is now in Heaven at the right Hand of God, should at the same Time be on Earth in the right Hand of the Priest; and that there should be several thousands of those Bodies upon Earth at many hundreds of Miles Distance from one another, and yet all these be that very same one Body also, this is such Talk, that for sober Persons in their sober Senses to use it, and keep their Countenance, is very strange. If one and one be two, then one Body of Christ here, and one Body of Christ there, make two Bodies of Christ, which they own he hath not. And if one Body can be in more than one Place at one Time, we may all of us perhaps be now this
very

very Instant at *Rome* as well as here: a Man may be at ever so many thousand Miles Distance from himself, and afterwards he may come and meet himself, (as two of their pretended real Bodies of Christ often do;) and then pass by himself and go away from himself to the same Distance he was at before: he may in one Place be standing still, in another be carried along, and so be in Motion and not in Motion at the same Time. - Men may say such Things as these if they will: and they may believe them if they can. But in order to it, well do they direct their poor People to profess in their *English* Manual of Prayers before Mass, 1725, p. 409. *Herein I utterly renounce the Judgement of my Senses, and all human Understanding.*

Here therefore we fix our Foot: If these Things be to every Man living evidently absurd and impossible, then let no Body ever regard the most specious Pretences of proving such Doctrines, or the Authority of a Church that maintains them. It is no hard Matter for an artful Man, a little practised in disputing, so to confound a plain Man upon almost any Subject, that he shall not well know how to answer, though he sees himself to be right, and the other wrong. This is an Art which the Priests
of

of the Church of *Rome* are well versed in. Indeed the chief Part of their Learning is to puzzle themselves first, and as many others as they can afterwards. But always observe this Rule: Stick to common Sense against the World: and whenever a Man would persuade you of any Thing evidently contrary to that, never be moved by any Tricks and Fetches of Sophistry, let him use ever so many. He will be for proving to you by round-about Arguments, of which you are unqualified to judge, that his Church is infallible, and therefore Transubstantiation is true. Do you answer him by a much plainer Argument, of which you are very well qualified to judge: that Transubstantiation cannot possibly be true, and therefore his Church is not infallible.

But they plead; with God all Things are possible, and therefore this is so. Now we own that all Things which are not impossible in themselves, are possible with Him; but God himself cannot do what in its own Nature cannot be done. For Instance, he cannot destroy his own Being, he cannot cease to be just and good, because this hath a Contradiction in it; and for the same Reason he cannot do any Thing else that hath a Contradiction in it: for that would

be doing a Thing and at the same Time not doing it: to ascribe which to God is not to magnify, but mock his Power.

But they say further, that Transubstantiation hath no more Difficulty than the Trinity hath. But surely the Difference is very visible. The Doctrine of the Trinity indeed is a Myſtery: that is, the whole of the Subject cannot be fully understood by us. But in Transubstantiation there is no Myſtery at all. For the most evident Falshoods are as just clearly understood to be so as the most evident Truths. In the Trinity there is nothing we see to be false; only we do not see the particular Manner in which some Things said concerning it are true: but in Transubstantiation there are many Things we see to be false, and which can in no Manner be true. Let them show us any Contradiction in the Doctrine of the Trinity, and we will believe it no longer. In the mean Time, since we have shown Contradiction in Transubstantiation, let *them* believe *that* no longer.

But they have Scripture to plead for it. Now if this were a Doctrine of Scripture, it would sooner prove Scripture to be false, than Scripture could prove it to be true; and therefore the Papists, by making such a monstrous Ab-

furdity an Article of Faith, have loaded their Religion with a Weight, which, did it belong to Christianity, were able to sink it. But, God be thanked, Scripture is no more on their Side than Reason. We know indeed that our Saviour said when he gave the Sacrament, *This is my Body*. But so at another Time he said, *Verily verily I am the Door of the Sheep*: and at a third, *I am the Vine*. And so have all Mankind always called a Representation of any Thing by the Name of what it represented. Why then is He not to be understood in the same Figure here? How do we think the Apostles understood him but as they were used to do in such Cases? They who were so backward at comprehending difficult Things, and so ready to ask Questions about them, did they without any Surprise or any Question apprehend that our Saviour then took his own Body in his own Hand, and gave that one Body to each of his twelve Apostles at the same Time, and that each of them swallowed him down their Throats, though he was all the while sitting at the Table along with them? Such Things are too ridiculous to be mentioned in a serious Place, and yet these Men force us to it by gravely requiring us to believe them. The only considerable Pas-

sage besides, that they plead, is in the sixth Chapter of St. *John*; where many *Jews* having followed our Saviour because he had fed them with the Miracle of the Loaves, he bids them *labour not for the Meat which perisheth, but that which endureth unto everlasting Life, which He would give them who is the true Bread from Heaven.* Now were this meant of the Sacrament, and to be understood literally, we must conclude not Bread turned into Christ's Body, but his Body turned into Bread; which is quite the contrary to what they hold. But indeed the whole is only a figurative Way of saying that the Souls of Men receive from the Fruits of his Death a much more valuable Nourishment than their Bodies receive from their daily Food. Just as he elsewhere says ^m, *Whoever drinketh of the Water that I shall give him, it shall be in him a Well of Water springing up into everlasting Life*; which no Body ever understood literally: and just as Wisdom speaks of herself in *Ecclus* xxiv. 21. *They that eat me shall yet be hungry, and they that drink me shall yet be thirsty*; that is, they who have tasted the Pleasures and Benefits of Virtue will always desire a still greater Experience of them. But the *Jews*, with their usual Perverseness, cavilling

^m John iv. 14.

at these Words of our Saviour's, he goes on very strongly to assert the Propriety of them, that *his Flesh is Meat indeed, and his Blood Drink indeed, that he who eateth the one and drinketh the other, dwelleth in him and liveth by him, but he that doth not, hath no Life in him.* But now these Words being spoken, you see, concerning the present Time, *My Flesh is Meat indeed,* and so on, cannot principally relate to the Sacrament; for there was yet no such Thing, nor till a Year or two after. Besides; it is not true that he, and he only, who eateth the Sacrament, shall dwell in Christ and live by him. For Persons may possibly have no Opportunity of receiving the Sacrament, and yet be very good Christians, and too many receive it frequently, and yet are very bad Christians. The Meaning therefore plainly is, that our Saviour's coming and suffering in the Flesh, and shedding his Blood for Mankind, is the spiritual Life of the World: that whoever imbibes the Doctrine he taught in his Life, and partakes by Faith of the Benefits he procured at his Death, his Soul is inwardly strengthened by them, and shall be finally preserved to a happy Immortality. For in this spiritual and figurative Sense he immediately directs his Disciples to understand his

Words; when misunderstanding them in a gross and literal one had somewhat staggered them. *Doth this, says he, offend you? It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the Flesh profiteth nothing. The Words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are Life.* His Manner of Expression had the same Intent with that Passage of St. Paulⁿ, where he says, *the Israelites did all eat the same spiritual Meqt, and did all drink the same spiritual Drink. For they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* The Papists themselves do not think from hence, that the *Jews* did eat and drink Christ literally: and Christians do it in the same Manner they did, only with a clearer and more distinct Faith. For in this spiritual Sense, Christ himself explains his Words; we firmly believe *His Body and Blood to be verily and indeed taken and received by the Faithful in the Lord's Supper*; that is, an Union with him, to be not only represented, but really and effectually communicated to the worthy Receiver. But as for any other Sense, if we did, or could do so monstrous a Thing, as literally to eat the Flesh, and drink the Blood of our dear Lord, it is not that which could do our Souls any Good,

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

but

but only his Grace accompanying this Sacrament : which may as well accompany it without any Change of the Bread and Wine, as it accompanies that of Baptism, without any Change of the Water.

We see then that Scripture by no Means favours Transubstantiation. It is indeed express against it. For St. *Paul* more than once tells us, that what we eat in the Sacrament is *Bread*, and as for what we drink, when our Saviour says, *this is my Blood which is shed for you*, if he had meant literally, he had spoke falsely : for his Blood was not shed till afterwards, and could not be drank then. Neither is it in a Condition of being shed at present, and therefore cannot be drank now. But too much hath been said of this monstrous Doctrine, to which the Indiscretion of well-meaning Writers gave the first Occasion pretty early, whilst they affected to heighten the figurative Expressions of Scripture, by still more figurative ones of their own ; little thinking at the same Time, that such an absurd Meaning, as the Papists now plead for, could ever be ascribed to them ; and plainly showing, by innumerable Proofs, that it is unjustly ascribed to them. But as Ignorance and Superstition increased, about 800 Years after

Christ this amazing Notion began to be distinctly, and explicitly entertained and asserted, which some had the good Sense to oppose; some the Weakness to receive, as a Mystery that promoted the Reverence of the Sacrament; others the Wickedness to support with Zeal, as an Artifice that increased the Authority of the Priest: for what could he not do, who, as they blasphemously express it, could make God? By Degrees then this Doctrine prevailed; till, in the 13th Century, it was established as an Article of Faith. And when once the speculative Error, of believing the consecrated Bread and Wine to be literally the Body and Blood of Christ, obtained, the practical one of worshipping them as such, quickly followed. For though a decent Respect was always paid to the Sacrament, yet a direct Adoration to the Elements was never paid, till the dark and superstitious Ages abovementioned introduced so senseless an Idolatry, to the infinite Scandal of Religion. May God, who mercifully winked at the Times of Heathen Ignorance, overlook this less excusable Folly of Christians, and *forgive them, for they know not what they do.* But let us all remember, that our Case will be much worse than

4 than

than theirs, if, after the Light hath so clearly shone upon us, we return to Darkness again: if, as the Apostle expresses it, *we change the Truth of God into a Lie, and worship the Creature instead of the Creator, who is blessed for evermore°. Amen.*

° Rom. i. 25.

from the very first, the light has been clearly
 shown to us, we return to the light again.
 It is the light of the spirit which we change the
 light of God into a light which is the light of
 the world of the spirit, and it is the light for
 the world of the spirit.

From the first

S E R M O N XIV.

I PET. v. 12.

*—Exhorting and testifying that this is the true
Grace of God wherein ye stand.*

HAVING proposed from these Words, first, to show what is the Rule of Christian Faith and Practice; and, secondly, to examine by this Rule the chief Differences between the Church of *Rome* and ours: the former Head I have finished, and made some Progress in the latter. The Honour paid by them to Saints and Images, the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, and the Worship built upon it of the Sacramental Bread and Wine, have been considered: and now I proceed to another Peculiarity of theirs, with Respect to the Sacrament, withholding the Cup from the Laity. That our Saviour administered the Holy Eucharist in both Kinds, they acknowledge: nay, that

that he expressly commanded those, to whom he administered it, that they should *all drink of that Cup*. What therefore he commands all to do, why do they forbid all but the Priest to do? Why; the Apostles, they say, were commanded to take the Cup as well as the Bread, because they were Clergy. But the Church of *Rome* forbids even the Clergy, excepting those who officiate, to take it. Besides, if the Command of receiving the *Cup* relates only to the Clergy, that of receiving the *Bread* too, must relate only to the Clergy: for there is no Manner of Distinction made in the Gospel. Yet they own the Laity are obliged by our Saviour's Command to receive the Bread, and therefore they are obliged by the same Command, to receive the Cup: which that they did accordingly, the eleventh Chapter of the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, makes as plain as Words can make any Thing. Not to say further, that if the sixth of St. *John* relate immediately to the Sacrament, as they are sometimes very positive it doth, the fifty-third Verse of that Chapter expressly declares, that, unless we *drink the Blood of the Son of Man*, as well as *eat his Flesh*, we have no Life in us.

But

But they tell us, our Saviour himself, after his Resurrection, administered the Sacrament in one Kind only. For St. *Luke* says, that sitting down to eat with the two Disciples at *Emmaus*, *He took Bread and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them*: and, upon their knowing him, *vanished out of their Sight*^a. Now it happens, that this was not administering the Sacrament at all, but doing just the same Thing, which the Evangelists, in just the same Words tell us he did, when he fed the Multitudes with the Loaves and Fishes; and indeed at every Meal he eat. For the *Jews* in the Beginning of every Meal of theirs, use the very same Custom to this Day^b. But they further plead, that however that be, at least when in the Acts of the Apostles it is said, the *Disciples met together to break Bread on the first Day of the Week*^c: this must be the Sacrament; and the Cup is not once mentioned there as given. We answer, 'tis not certain that even this was the Sacrament: and supposing it was, as, in Scripture-language, common Feasts are expressed by the single Phrase of eating Bread, which yet surely does not prove, that the Guests drank nothing,

^a Luke xxiv. 30, 31.
^c Acts xx. 7.

^b Buxtorf. Synag. Jud. c. 12.

so neither is it proved, by a religious Feast being expressed in the same Manner. And besides, if there is no Mention there of the Laity's receiving the Cup, there is none of the Priest's receiving it neither: yet this they think absolutely necessary: and if one may be taken for granted, without being mentioned, the other may. Nor should it be forgotten on this Occasion, that as the Phrase of eating sometimes comprehends the whole of this Action, so doth that of drinking: *we have all been made to drink into one Spirit*, says the Apostle^a; who hence proves the Unity of all Christians, and therefore certainly thought it was the Right of all Christians^a. But they plead farther, that the Laity, by receiving the Body of Christ, receive his Blood also: for the Blood is contained in the Body. But here they quite forget, that our Saviour hath appointed this Sacrament to be received for a Memorial of his Blood's being shed out of his Body, of which, they who receive not the Cup, do not make the Memorial which he commanded, when he said, *Drink ye all of this*. Still they insist, that there being no peculiar Virtue or Benefit annexed to this Part of the Sacrament that they with-hold,

^a 1 Cor. xii. 13.

^a Claret, Vol. i. Sermon. x. p. 265.
which

which does not belong to the other, 'tis no Manner of Loss to the Laity to omit it. Now does not the same Reason prove equally, that the Clergy may omit it too? But besides, what Treatment of our blessed Lord is this, when he hath appointed all Christians to perform a solemn Act of Religion, consisting of two Parts, both with equal Strictness enjoined; for the Church of *Rome* to say that one of them, the far greatest Part of Christians shall not perform, for 'tis full as well let alone: nay better indeed, if we believe them: for the Cup they tell us, may be drank of immoderately, may be spilled, many dreadful Inconveniences may happen from trusting it with the Laity? Now 'tis strange our Saviour should not be wise enough to foresee these Inconveniences: 'tis strange we should not experience them neither: and it adds to the Wonder not a little, that the whole Church of Christ, for 1200 Years, should not be able to find them out any more than we. For in all that Time, the Cup was constantly given to the Laity in their public Communion, though there are some Instances, yet neither many, nor early ones, in which the Bread alone was carried to private Houses. And when some of the Laity, for absurd Reasons, refused to take the Cup,

Cup, no less than three Popes condemned them. But superstitious Imaginations gradually increasing amongst Christians, a Custom arose first of giving the Bread dipt in Wine instead of both separate, and at last in the 15th Century the Council of *Constance*, the same which decreed so honestly, that Promises made to the Prejudice of the Catholic Faith ought not to be kept^f, decreed also very modestly, that notwithstanding (for so they express it) our Saviour administered both Kinds, one only shall be administered for the future to the Laity. And now it is made an Article of their Creed, that the whole Sacrament is given by giving this Part: so that whoever shall say both are necessary, (which, if it be not a Truth, one should think could not be a Herefy) is by the Council of *Trent* pronounced accursed.

Another Difference between the Church of *Rome* and ours with Respect to the Sacrament is this. They hold that, as often as it is celebrated, Christ is truly and properly offered up a Sacrifice for our Sins. Now we acknowledge, that every Act of Obedience and of Worship more especially, may, agreeably to the Language of Scripture, be spoken of as a Sacrifice

^f See *Courayer's Council of Trent*, Vol. i. p. 595.

to our Maker: that his Creatures of Bread and Wine, when appropriated to this solemn Act of Religion, are so far Offerings to God: and that this whole Act, being a Memorial and Representation of the Sacrifice of Christ, may fitly enough be called by the same Name with what it commemorates and represents: so that in this Sense Christians have an Altar and an Offering upon it. But that, instead of a representative Sacrifice of Praise, it should be a real Sacrifice of Atonement, in which Christ's Body, literally speaking, is every Day offered up anew, of this we can see neither Proof nor Possibility. For not only it supposes Transubstantiation to be true, which hath been proved to be false; but it is absolutely inconsistent with two whole Chapters of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*; the ninth and tenth; which throughout inculcate that *Christ was not to be offered up often, for then must he often have suffered; but that he appeared once to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself; was once offered to bear the Sins of many; and by this one Offering hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified.* If therefore our Doctrine be heretical in this Point, St. Paul's is so too: not to speak of the primitive Christians; who, though they often called this

Ordinance a Sacrifice, yet, by calling it an unbloody one, shew they did not think the Blood of Christ was literally offered up in it; and by frequently saying they had indeed no Sacrifices, prove themselves to look on this only as a figurative one.

But now from this Notion of a daily Atonement thus made, I shall proceed to their other Doctrines concerning the Forgiveness of Sins. And here they hold, that a particular Absolution from a Priest is necessary, if it can be had, for the Pardon of every mortal Sin, *i. e.* every Sin by which any Person without Repentance forfeits his Title to Heaven: and that a particular Confession of every material Circumstance of every such Sin, is necessary for Absolution. And the Practice of these Things they apprehend to give their Church an unspeakable Advantage over ours.

The Necessity of such Absolution they plead for from our Saviour's Words to his Apostles: *Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven^e. Whosoever Sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever Sins ye retain, they are retained^f.* Now cer-

^e Matt. xviii. 18.

^f John xx. 23.

tainly these Words did not put it in the Power of the Apostles themselves, to pardon or refuse to pardon whom they pleased, right or wrong. They could use the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven no further, than he saw fit, *who openeth, and no Man shutteth: who shutteth, and no Man openeth*^s. Yet the Apostles had great Powers by Virtue of these Words, which we have not: the Power of discerning by the Spirit, in many Cases at least, and therefore of declaring, who were penitent and pardoned, who otherwise: the Power of inflicting and continuing miraculous Punishments on wicked Persons, which is *binding and retaining* their Sins; and of removing such Punishments, which is *loosing and remitting* them. But these Things the *Romish* Clergy can no more claim than we. What then besides can there be conveyed by these Words of our Lord? A Power of preaching that Gospel, according to the Terms of which alone, the Sins of Men shall be forgiven or punished; a Power of admitting Persons into a State of Forgiveness by Baptism, of administering to them the Word of God and the holy Sacrament, as Means of Grace; of denouncing his Wrath against all Sinners, interceding with

^s Rev. iii. 7.

him for all Penitents, and pronouncing in his Name that he pardons and absolves them. These Things, we trust, are done much more faithfully by us than them. There is indeed another Power, of exercising spiritual Discipline, for the Honour of the Church and the Sake of Example, to distinguish so far as Men are able between the good, by admitting them to Communion with us, and the bad, by excluding them from it. In this we acknowledge that we are deficient: but they are worse: for they have utterly perverted it from a public Institution of general Use and Influence, to a secret Transaction between a Sinner and his Confessor, in which not only such Absolution is made necessary, as the Scripture hath no where required, but such Confession insisted on as is no Way needful to it. Not needful from any Command of God: for the chief and almost only Text they plead for that Purpose, *Confess your Faults one to another*^h, no more obliges the People in all Cases to reveal the Particulars of their Sins to the Priest, than the Priest to reveal the Particulars of his to the People. Nor is it needful from the Nature of the Thing: for it is not knowing a Person's Sins that can qualify the

^h James v. 16.

Priest to give him Absolution, but knowing he hath repented of them: which is just as possible to be known without a particular Confession, as with it.

Still in many Cases acknowledging the Errors of our Lives, and opening the State of our Souls to the Ministers of God's Word, for their Opinion, their Advice, and their Prayers, may be extremely useful, sometimes necessary. And whenever Persons think it so, we are ready both to hear them with the utmost Secresy, and to assist them with our best Care: to direct them how they may be forgiven, if we think they are not; to pronounce them forgiven, if we think they are. Only we must beg them to remember, that none but God can pardon Sins as to their Consequences in another World. Men indeed may take off from Sinners the Censures of the Church if they have incurred them; but as to any Thing farther, all we can do is either to pray to God that he would forgive them, (which was the only Form of Absolution till the eleventh Century at least) or else to declare that he hath done so. And let such a Declaration express ever so positively that either God or the Priest absolves them, it is a fatal Error to build Hopes on this, with Respect to

another Life, any further than conditionally, that if their Repentance be sufficient, their Forgiveness is certain. But whether it be sufficient or no, the Priests of our Church can give their Judgement, and those of the Church of *Rome* can possibly do no more. For they must own themselves to be as fallible as we are.

But as neither Reason nor Scripture makes Confession and Absolution of this Kind necessary, so neither did the primitive Church hold it to be so. Public Confession indeed they required in Cases of public Scandal: but for private Confession in all Cases, it was never thought of as a Command of God for 900 Years after Christ; nor determined to be such till after 1200: when the same Council of *Lateran* decreed it, which decreed also the deposing of such Princes as would not extirpate Heresy. And yet it is amazing what Stress they now lay upon it. No Repentance, they tell us, will avail, if it be neglected: and almost any will do, if it be observed. For let a dying Sinner have only what they call Attrition, such a Sorrow as arises merely from the Fear of being punished without the least Degree of Dislike to Sin or Love to God, this Sorrow, though not sufficient without Absolution, yet, with it, is. So that if

a Person who hath disregarded God all his Life, can but be made afraid of him at his Death, the Priest shall deliver him from Hell, and secure Heaven to him, by a Word speaking. Some lesser Punishments indeed he doth remain subject to first: as to which however there are Ways of making Matters as easy as can well be wished. But in order to understand them, another Head of *Popish* Doctrine must be explained.

Our Saviour, they tell us, having procured for repenting Sinners the Forgiveness only of the eternal Punishment due to their Sins, there remains a temporal Punishment due to them still, which, if it be not in this Life either inflicted by worldly Sufferings, or satisfied for by good Works and Penances, must be undergone after Death, in the Pains of a Place called *Purgatory*: which Pains may, however, be mitigated and shortened, partly by offering up Prayers for such Persons, and partly by granting Indulgences to them. And these Things also we are Heretics for not believing. Yet for the Necessity of our believing these Doctrines, they pretend no Scripture-Proof, and they have no Proof for so much as the Truth of them. Heaven and Hell we read of perpetually in the Bi-

ble, but Purgatory we never meet with : though surely, if there be such a Place, Christ and his Apostles would not have concealed it from us. St. Paul indeed mentions, *a Fire that tries every Man's Works, and Persons that shall be saved, yet so as by Fire*[†]. But what is he there speaking of ? He had been laying amongst them, he says, the Foundation of Religion, the Acknowledgement of Jesus Christ. *On this*, says he, *another Man hath built ; but let every Man take Heed how he buildeth ; what he teaches for Christian Doctrine ; for the Day shall declare it, and the Fire shall try every Man's Work of what Sort it is : either the Day of the fiery Trial of Persecution, or rather, the final Judgement of God, whose Day shall burn like an Oven*[‡], this shall try every Man's Work, search it as thoroughly as Fire does Things that are put into it. Then, *if any Man's Work which he hath built, abide, if the Doctrines he hath taught bear the Test, he shall receive a Reward ; but, if his Work be burnt, if, preserving the Fundamentals of Christianity, he hath built Errors on them, he shall suffer Loss ; the Pains he hath taken shall be of no Benefit, and though he may be saved himself, it shall be like one that es-*

† 1 Cor. iii. 13, 15.

‡ Mal. iv. 1.

capas through the Fire, with great Danger and Difficulty. For so St. *Jude* speaks: *Some save with Fear, pulling them out of the Fire*¹: and the Prophet *Amos*, *Ye were as a Firebrand plucked out of the burning*^m. This Passage therefore relates not to punishing, in Purgatory, the Persons of some Men, before the Day of Judgement, but to trying the Works of all Men at the Day of Judgement: and, far from patronizing the Church of *Rome*, gives them indeed an awful Warning *not to build on the Foundation of Christianity Hay and Stubble*; such useless Trash as this, and many other of their Doctrines; which that great Day of the Lord will show to have no Solidity in them: but *their Works shall be burnt up, themselves suffer Loss, and at best be saved only so as by Fire*. Their other Texts for Purgatory are, if possible, less to the Purpose than this: that *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven, either in this Life or that to come*ⁿ; which is only saying, it shall never be forgiven, but punished both here and hereafter; that he who *agrees not with his Adversary in the Way, shall be cast by the Judge into Prison, and not come out till*

¹ Jude, ver. 23,^m Amos. iv. 11.ⁿ Matt. xii. 32.

he hath paid the uttermost Farthing °; which perhaps is only saying, that whoever doth not make up a Difference with his Neighbour before Trial, must expect no Favour after: Or, if God be the Judge meant, the Sense will be, that the Person condemned shall never come out of Prison, because he can never *pay the uttermost Farthing*. For Uncharitableness unrepented of, which is the Crime here mentioned, the Papists themselves own, sends Men not to Purgatory, but to Hell. As for their Notion, that our Saviour hath not procured Forgiveness of the temporal Punishment of Sin, 'tis certain from Scripture, that he hath procured the Forgiveness of every Thing that can properly be called Punishment. For *his Blood cleanseth us from all Sin* ^p; and therefore no Purgatory is needful. And *there is no Condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus* ^s, and consequently no such Place to be condemned to. Correction indeed there is; but this Correction is the Work, not of an offended Judge, but a merciful Father: and as he, by these and many other Means endeavours to amend us, so we should use all proper Means to amend ourselves: but such Penances as tend only to give Pain, are not proper Means even in

° Matt. v. 25, 26.

^p 1 John i. 7.^s Rom. viii. 1.

this Life, which is our only Time of Amendment; much less will any such be inflicted on good Men in the other, when they will come too late for any valuable Purpose. *Blessed, says the Angel, are the Dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth, from the Hour of their Death, for they rest from their Labours*¹. But miserable, says the Church of Rome, are many of the Dead that die in the Lord, for a long Time after, for they rest not from their Labours, but labour under most grievous Sufferings. But indeed, even their own apocryphal Scriptures might have taught them better than this. *The Souls of the Righteous are in the Hand of God, and there shall no Torment touch them*². Nor is their Plea from Antiquity better than that from Scripture. For though many had adopted strange Notions of these Things, out of Heathen Fable and Philosophy, into the Christian Religion, yet Purgatory, in the present Popish Sense, was not heard of for 400 Years after Christ; nor universally received even in the Western Churches for 1000 Years; nor almost in any other Church than that of Rome, to this Day. But supposing there were such a Place, how do they know concerning any particular Person that he ever

¹ Rev. xiv. 13.² Wisd. iii. 1.

comes into it, or how long he stays in it? And if not, what is it but *offering the Sacrifice of Fools*; to make thousands of Prayers for one, who may be quite out of the Reach of them, either in Heaven, or perhaps in Hell? Though indeed, by praying for the very wickedest of Men, as only in Purgatory, they strongly tempt other wicked Men to conclude, that none of their Communion ever go to Hell. And thus is this Invention at once so great a Terror to good Persons, and so great a Comfort to bad ones, that one cannot help applying to it the Prophet's Words: *With Lies ye have made the Heart of the Righteous sad, whom I have not made sad: and strengthened the Hands of the Wicked, that he should not return from his wicked Way, by promising him Life*^u. But were they to pray not for particular Persons, as they do, but only in general for all that are there; where is the Command, where is even the Permission for it? Our Brethren on Earth we pray for, because the Time of their Trial is not yet over. But the State of the Dead is fixed, and they shall receive, every Man, not according to our Prayers, but their own past Works. Purgatory, they tell us, is that Prison whence Men shall

^t Ecclef. v. 1.

^u Ezek. xiii. 22.

not come out *till they have paid the last Farthing*: and what room is there then for our Prayers for them there? We own indeed, some Sort of Prayers for the Dead were used by the Church (tho' without any Warrant for them that appears) very early, within 200 Years after Christ. But then originally these were made, not for Souls in Purgatory, for whom the Papists pray, but for Saints in *Paradise*, for whom they do not pray; for all righteous Persons deceased, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, even for the blessed Virgin herself: and hence it appears by the Way, that they did not pray to these since they prayed for them. And the Subject-matter of their Prayers was, that God would grant them his promised Mercy in the Day of Judgement, and speedily complete their Happiness in Body and Soul. In Process of Time, it must be owned, Men fell into a Variety of groundless Suppositions, concerning the State of Christians between Death and the Resurrection; and upon these Suppositions they formed their Prayers, which many Persons went so far as to imagine could benefit even Sinners in Hell. But as all these Suppositions, for a long Time, were different from, and inconsistent with, the *Ramish* Notions of Purgatory, so the Prayers, which the Ancients used

used for the Dead, even were they of Authority, (which they are not, for nothing is so but what appears to come from God) would condemn, and not justify those Prayers which the Papists use.

Another Popish Method of relieving Sinners is by Indulgences. Originally this Word meant a very right Thing, the Mitigation of the Severity or Length of Ecclesiastical Censures towards such, as, by an exemplary Repentance, had deserved it. Nor was any other Sort of Indulgences known for at least 600 Years, perhaps much longer. But the present Notion of the Church of *Rome* about them, (though in their Disputes with us they would fain disguise it if they could) is this. Many of the Saints, it seems, having not only done enough to merit immediate Entrance into Heaven, but more than was necessary for that Purpose, this Overplus of their Goodness, called usually Works of Supererogation, joined with the infinite Merits of Christ, makes a Treasure of inestimable Value, which the Church hath the Disposal of, and the Pope, as Head of the Church, applies towards the Remission of their Sins, who either fulfil in their Life-time certain Conditions appointed by him, or whose Friends will fulfil

them after their Deaths. Now we, on the contrary, have learnt from Scripture, that in many Things the best of us all offend; that, were our Obedience perfect, it were no more than our Duty; and that, to the Grace of God, not to the Merit of our Works, the Salvation of our Souls is owing. In some Respects indeed, in useless Mortifications and Observances of no Value, we acknowledge many Saints of their Church have done much more than God requires, much more than he approves or will reward. But even had they done more really good Things than they were obliged to, this might indeed increase their own Happiness in another World: but what Pretence is there for affirming, that instead of that it shall be transferred away to the Benefit of others; and those others, just whomsoever the Pope shall please? This sure is very hard. But after all, what is the Benefit conferred by these Indulgences? If it be only Deliverance, either wholly, or in Part, from Purgatory; there is no such Place to be delivered from. And that it is from Hell, they dare not say indeed, but they do every Thing that can make the ignorant think it. Why else are Christ's Merits mentioned as one Ground of Indulgences? For he hath not
merited,

merited, they tell us, Deliverance from temporary Punishments, as Purgatory is, but from eternal ones only. Why also do their Indulgences declare themselves to bestow the most full Remission and Forgiveness of all Sins, if they mean only the smallest Part of Forgiveness? These Things are too plainly calculated to deceive poor Wretches into a fatal Belief, that, by such Methods, Wickedness here may become consistent with Happiness hereafter. Repentance indeed is, in Words, made one Condition of obtaining these Indulgences: but this is easily explained away, or overlooked amongst the others joined with it, of saying so many Prayers, going to so many Processions, and paying so much Money. Nay, if their own Historians are to be credited, the Inhabitants of whole Cities at once, upon visiting certain Churches, and paying a certain Sum, have before now been absolved of all their Sins by the Pope, with these very Words added; *Even though they had not been contrite for them, nor confessed them.* But, as the Reformation was first brought on by the Enormities of Indulgences, so, since the Reformation, they have in many Places, both in this and other Respects, greatly moderated their Practices, though

though they have never effectually disclaimed their Principles. And indeed, as angry as they are with that happy Event, they have great Reason to be thankful for it, on Account of several Changes for the better, which it has produced amongst them, especially where Part of any Country have been Protestants. For elsewhere all their Abuses are kept up. And for one Proof of it, I have now in my Custody a plenary Indulgence granted for a small Piece of Gold at *Rome* this very Year^w to an absolute Stranger, for himself, for his Kindred to the third Degree, and to thirty Persons more, for whose Names a proper Blank is left in the Instrument. So that had not the Reformation given them some Check, God knows whether by this Time Christianity had been discoverable under the Changes and Disguises which the prevailing Part of them would have deformed it with. Consider but to what Lengths Matters had already gone, in this one Article of the Remission of Sins. The Necessity of Confession put the Secrets of every Man's Heart and Life into the Breast of the Priest, and the Power of admitting into Heaven, or excluding from it, forced the bigotted Sinner to do whatever should

be enjoined him. In how monstrous a Manner this Power was used, the Histories of all Nations dreadfully show. And then to preserve it from growing quite intolerable, an Artifice was added that made it still more fatal. It is too well known that Mankind will do any Thing rather than their Duty, and part with any Thing sooner than their Vices. On the Terms therefore of submitting in other Points, they were made easy in this favourite one. The strictest Rules of Life indeed were laid down for such as thought themselves bound to be strict: but for those, who desired to be otherwise, superstitious Observances were allowed to take Place of real Duties; idle Penances to stand instead of true Repentance and Reformation: without a Zeal for such Follies as these, the best Man was reckoned to have but small Hope of future Happiness; and with a Zeal for the Notions and Interests of holy Church, the worst Man was easily secured from future Misery. Absolution, if he were but ever so little sorry for having been a Sinner, would set him clear at once from Hell; and, if he had but either Time to perform a few silly Devotions and Mortifications while he lived, or Money to purchase a good many Prayers for him when he died,

died, his Confinement in Purgatory must soon be over: and thus was the Necessity of a holy Life quite taken away, and the Gospel of Christ altogether made void. Far be it from us of this Church to affright you with such vain Terrors, or deceive you with such vain Hopes. On the contrary, be assured that were all the Priests on Earth to refuse absolving a true Penitent, it would never hurt him; and were they all to join in absolving a Man that hath not repented as the Gospel requires, it would do him no Good. Be assured that no Equivalent in the World will be accepted instead of true inward Piety, nor all the good Works of all the Saints in Heaven compensate in the least Degree for the Want of good Works in any one Man on Earth. Never be moved then by the most confident Pretences of this Kind, but know, for a Certainty, that whoever flies for Refuge from his Sins to those who will flatter him with such wretched Expedients as these; instead of mending his Condition by trusting to them, only makes it worse and more desperate than it was before. The Words of God in the Case of the *Israelites*, are just as applicable in this: *Because ye have said; we have made a Covenant with Death, and with Hell we are at Agreement;*

when the overflowing Scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us, for we have made Lies our Refuge, and under Falshood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God—Your Covenant with Death shall be disannulled, and your Agreement with Hell shall not stand: when the overflowing Scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be trodden down by it. Judgement will I lay to the Line, and Righteousness to the Plumbet; and the Hail shall sweep away the Refuge of Lies, and the Waters shall overflow the hiding Place^x.

Ye therefore, Beloved, to conclude with the Words of St. Peter, seeing ye know these Things, beware lest, being led away with the Error of the Wicked, ye fall from your own Steadfastness: But grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be Glory both now and for ever. Amen.

^x Is. xxviii. 15, 17, 18.

^y 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

S E R M O N X V .

I P E T . V . 12 .

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true
Grace of God wherein ye stand.*

AFTER fixing the Rule of Christian Faith and Practice, I proceeded to compare with this Rule the chief Things which distinguish the Church of *Rome* from ours. Great Numbers of these I have already considered, and shall now, for your fuller Satisfaction, go on to some others.

Several of their Notions concerning the Pardon of Sin I have mentioned and confuted; but there still remains one more to be spoken of: their Custom, when a sick Person is near Death, of anointing his Eyes, and Ears, and Nostrils, and Mouth, and Hands, sometimes also his Feet, and Reins, with Oil consecrated by the

Bishop, and praying, that in Virtue of that anointing, the Sins which he hath committed, by the several Organs of his Body, may be forgiven him. This they call *extreme Unction*, or the Sacrament of dying Persons; and teach, that, besides Forgiveness of Sins, it gives Composure and Strength of Mind to go through the Agonies of Death. All this they build wholly on the following Passage of St. *James*. *Is any sick among you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with Oil in the Name of the Lord. And the Prayer of Faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed Sins, they shall be forgiven him*^a. But a little Consideration will show that what St. *James* appoints is very different from what the Church of *Rome* does. In those Days miraculous Gifts were common; that of healing Diseases in particular: and the Persons who had these Gifts were usually the Elders of the Churches, whom the Apostle here directs to be sent for. And as Miracles, in Condescension to the Genius of the *Jewish* People, to whom this Epistle is directed, were accompanied, for the most Part, with some outward Act

^a James v. 14, 15.

of Ceremony, by the Performer of them; (a Practice which our Saviour himself often complied with;) so the Ceremony used in healing the sick by Miracle, *viz.* anointing them with Oil, was one to which the *Jews* had been accustomed; Oil being a Thing of which much Use was made in the Eastern Countries, on many Occasions^b. Accordingly we read, that, when our Saviour sent out his Disciples with a Power from Heaven to cure Diseases, though he prescribed to them no particular Form for that Purpose, yet they adopted this; *they anointed with Oil many that were sick, and healed them*^c. Now what the Evangelist tells us they did, is evidently the very Thing which St. *James* directs the Elders of the Church to do. And therefore, since the anointing mentioned in the Gospel was only a mere Circumstance used in miraculous Cures; that also mentioned in the Epistles can be nothing more. Accordingly we find St. *James* neither appoints any Consecration

^b See *Wheatley* on the Office for the Sick. And *Grotius* on *Mark* vi. 13. says the *Jews* used it when they prayed for the Sick, to express their Hope of obtaining from God in their Behalf that Joy and Gladness which Oil signifies. *Preservative against Popery*, Tit. vii. c. ii. § iv. p. 62. ^c *Mark* vi. 13. The Council of *Trent* had at first said, that extreme Unction was instituted in this Place, but afterwards changed that Word for *insinuated*. *F. Paul* in *Preserv.* p. 64.

of the Oil, nor ascribes any Efficacy to it, as the Papists do: but says, *the Prayer of Faith shall save the Sick*. Now if this means only Prayer offered up in a general Faith of God's Providence, we use it for the Sick as well as they, and may hope for the same good Effect from it. But Faith, in many Places of Scripture, signifies that supernatural Persuasion and Feeling of a Power to work Miracles, which in those Days was frequent. Thus St. Paul says, *though I had all Faith, so that I could remove Mountains*^a, &c. And therefore *the Prayer of Faith*, since it is so absolutely promised here that it *shall save the Sick*,* probably means, a Prayer proceeding from this extraordinary Persuasion and Impulse: such a one as, in the next Verse, we translate *an effectual fervent Prayer*, but should translate an *inwrought or inspired Prayer*. And therefore unless, in the Church of Rome, the Priest, as often as he administers extreme Unction, acts and prays by immediate Inspiration, his Prayers are not of the Sort St. James speaks of; nor are they directed to the same End. The Benefit, which he promises from the Prayers that he appoints, is the Recovery of Health: *The Prayer of Faith shall*

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 2. See also Matt. xvii. 20. John xiv. 12, 13.

save the Sick, and the Lord shall raise him up: whereas they of the Church of Rome never use this Ceremony with any Hope of Recovery, nor indeed, unless they happen to mistake, till the Person is quite past Recovery. And, for this Reason again, His anointing and theirs are quite different Things. For though St. James does add; *And, if he have committed Sins, they shall be forgiven him;* yet the very Doubt, implied in the Word *if*, shews, he is not speaking of a Sacrament instituted purposely for the Remission of Sins, as the Church of Rome make their Unction to be. And indeed this relates to the very same Thing with his former Words. For, as bodily Sickness and Infirmary was frequently a Punishment for Sin; (whence, to mention no other Proofs, St. Paul tells the *Corinthians**, *For this Cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep;*) so, the very Form of miraculously healing a Person of these Infirmities, used by our Saviour is, *Son, thy Sins be forgiven thee*†: that is, the Illness inflicted on thee for thy Sins is removed. Since therefore St. James promises Forgiveness of Sins in just a like Case, we are certainly to understand him in just the like Sense; viz. that, if the Sickness of any Person prayed for were

* 1 Cor. xi. 30.

† Matt. ix. 2. See also John v. 14.

the Punishment of any Sin ; that Punishment should be remitted, and his Health restored. Now this Forgiveness of the temporal Punishment of some particular Sins, which is what St. *James* promises, the Church of *Rome* does not promise from this Ceremony ; and the Forgiveness of the future Punishment of all those Sins, that the sick Person hath ever committed by his Bodily Organs, which St. *James* does not promise, they do. Though indeed it is a little hard to conceive, when all a Man's Sins have been already forgiven ; (as they say they are, by the Priest's Absolution) how any of them should want to be forgiven again, perhaps by Extreme Unction, the Moment after. But the Truth is, they themselves lay not near so much Stress on this Ceremony's procuring Pardon of Sin, as its procuring Composure of Mind, against the Terrors of Death. Now most evidently this Expectation St. *James* hath not said one Word to countenance : so that his Precept, which seems at first Sight to be some Ground for their Practice, and is the only Ground they have, relates indeed to a quite different Thing, as one of their Cardinals, *Cajetan**, acknowledges. Though the Council of *Trent*,

* *Preservative*, Tit. vii. c. 2. §. 2. p. 60.

Seff. 14. hath thought proper since to curse all that shall say it. The anointing prescribed by St. *James* therefore, being intirely of a miraculous Nature, was in all Reason to cease, when Miracles were no more. And accordingly the primitive Christians, though they speak more than once of anointing with Oil in miraculous Cures; yet, in common Cases, never mention it as a Custom, much less as one appointed in Scripture, for the first 600 Years^a. After that indeed, they came to use it upon all sick Persons in the beginning of Sicknes, for a Means of Recovery, as the *Greek Church* doth yet; till finding it of little Benefit in that Way, the Church of *Rome*, about the twelfth Century, began to use it, in the Extremity of Sicknes, as a Sacrament of Preparation for Death; which if it were in Reality, they are surely much to blame for not giving it under the Apprehensions of an approaching violent Death; for Instance, before a Malefactor is executed; where it cannot but be as needful, as in the Fears of a natural one. Upon the whole, you see our laying aside a Ceremony which hath long been useless, and, by leading Persons into superstitious Fancies, might be hurtful, can be no Manner of Loss, whilst

^a Concerning a Passage of *Innocent I.* in the Beginning of the 5th Century. See *Preserv.* p. 75.

every Thing that continues truly valuable in St. *James's* Direction, is preserved in our Office for visiting the Sick : concerning which, I shall only add, that it is much to be wished Men would so live in the Time of their Health, as to need the least spiritual Assistance that is possible, in the Time of their Sicknes : and that what they do need, they would all apply for early, when it might be of great Benefit to them, and not content themselves with calling in the Minister at last for mere Form's Sake, when he can do them little Good, or none.

Another Point, in which we differ from the Church of *Rome*, is, that all their public Prayers are in the *Latin* Tongue, ours in our own. This sure at least is no Heresy, that, when we pray to God, we all know what we say. Our Practice justifies itself. But how is their's justified ? Reason and common Sense plainly condemn it. Antiquity is no less against them : for every Christian Church originally had their own Service in their own Tongue. That of the Western World was in *Latin*, only because *Latin* was their common Language : and therefore, it should have been no longer in *Latin*, when that ceased to be their common Language. And for Scripture, read but the 14th Chap. of

1 *Corinthians*, and see, what *St. Paul* would have judged of this *Romish* Practice. Even when there was a miraculous Gift of Tongues in the Church, and Men prayed, or prophesied in strange Languages by Inspiration; even then he requires such Persons to keep Silence, unless another were ready to interpret publicly what they spoke: for says he, *Brethren*——*Except ye utter Words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the Air. If I know not the Meaning of the Voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a Barbarian, and he that speaketh, shall be a Barbarian unto me. How shall he that occupieth the Room of the Unlearned say Amen, at thy giving of Thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? I thank my God I speak with Tongues more than you all: yet in the Church, I had rather speak five Words with my Understanding, than by my Voice I might teach others also, than ten Thousand Words in an unknown Tongue.* It immediately follows, and very fitly to the present Purpose: *Brethren, be not Children in Understanding: howbeit in Malice be ye Children, but in Understanding be Men.* For never sure was greater *Childishness*, than to be satisfied with the mere outward Show of Prayers to God, per-

haps without understanding one Word of them, which is not praying at all; nor greater *Malice*, that is, more wicked and cruel Cunning, than to keep the poor People in this Darkneſs, and plead for it with ſuch unfair Pretences as they do. Some of them tell us very gravely, that *Latin*, far from being an unknown Tongue, is the beſt known of any in *Europe*. And if it were; yet if this beſt known Tongue is notwithstanding unknown to ninety-nine Perſons in a hundred, why muſt they all be confined to it, and not have each their own Prayers in their own Tongue? Why, that Variety would be very inconvenient, they ſay, to Travellers. But whoſe Convenience is moſt to be conſulted? That of whole Nations, or of a few Perſons that come amongſt them occaſionally? But vulgar Tongues, they ſay, are perpetually changing, and Expreſſions growing improper and unintelligible. I answer: our having our Bible and Prayer-Book, in the vulgar Tongue, undoubtedly prevents its changing near ſo faſt as it would otherwiſe. But when it does change, let them, where it is needful, be changed to it. For which is worſe, to take this little Trouble of altering a few Words and Phraſes once in a hundred Years, or to let People go on for Ages together,

together, with Prayers and Lessons, of which they understand not one Word? But they alledge farther, that some of their Prayers, indeed a great Part of the Mass, it would be useless to have said in their own Language; for the Priest is ordered to speak it so low, that it cannot be heard: as if one Fault would excuse another, instead of making it greater. But many of their Prayers, they say, may be understood: for though spoken in *Latin*, there are printed Translations of them in *English*. But still, great Part of them is not translated, unless it be by some very modern Indulgence¹: and that which is, nothing but our making them ashamed of themselves hath forced them to of late in these Parts of the World against their Will. For we know that when, within this last Century, some well meaning Bishops of their own Church in *France*, had published the Mass in the vulgar Tongue, for the People's Use; the then Pope declared them Sons of Perdition to all the World, and condemned what they had done, as if it were the Overthrow of Religion². So that, for ought

¹ The *English* Translator of the Order and Canon of the Mass, hath omitted many of the Ceremonies, particularly above twenty Crosses out of less than thirty. *Tenison* on Idol. p. 5.

² Tillotson, Sermon. 246.

we know, the same Liberty taken here may fall under the same Condemnation, when a proper Time comes. Or were the contrary ever so certain, still putting their Prayers into *English* for the People, only shows that they ought to be spoken in *English* by the Priest: for this round-about Way is evidently a most absurd one; that he should be praying in one Language, and they following him by Guess, as well as they can, in another. Besides, Multitudes of their poor People have never heard of these Translations, or at least, have them not: Multitudes more are unable to read them: and all these must be left quite in the Dark. But we are told, they have a good Intention in general: they reverence what they do not understand, and this is sufficient. Now for the Purposes of spiritual Dominion, this may be sufficient: and such Devotions, as many of theirs are, will, we own, be more revered for not being understood. But for the Edification of the People, it is far from being sufficient, to have good Intentions in general, and no Meaning in particular: to pray to God for they know not what; and hear Lessons read, which they can learn nothing from.

Another

Another Thing, akin to the former, in which we differ from the Church of *Rome*, is, that we allow and exhort all Persons to read the holy Scriptures diligently. They, on the contrary, have expressly decreed, that, since the promiscuous Allowance of Bibles in the Vulgar Tongue does more Harm than Good, (these are the very Words of the Index published in Consequence of the Council of *Trent's* Order,) no one shall be suffered to read Translations of Scripture, even though made by Catholics, as they call themselves, unless the Bishop or Inquisitor, by the Advice of the Curate or Confessor, give him Leave in writing: and whoever transgresses this Rule, shall not be absolved till he gives up his Bible. Nay, throughout the whole Kingdom of *Spain*, all Bibles in their own Tongue are absolutely forbidden. And in all Popish Countries, getting one, by the Means here prescribed, being a Matter of Time, and Form, and Difficulty, and Suspicion, the Generality seldom put themselves to the Trouble of it. So that in many Parts of the World there are great Multitudes of that Communion, who perhaps have never either read or heard in their own Tongue one Chapter of the Bible in their whole Lives. Or if any one does ask for

Leave, it is never granted, where they dare refuse it, excepting to such as they are well assured beforehand will see nothing there but what they are bidden. So that where they have Permission to read the Scripture, they have none to understand it. Besides that, this Permission, even in those Countries where they are obliged to indulge it the most freely, as in our own, is but during Pleasure, and may at any Time be taken away when it will serve the Turn better: nor dare the poor deluded People, upon Pain of Damnation, help themselves. And as to Protestant Translations, having one is looked on as a Mark of Heresy; for which, in this very Nation, poor Creatures have been burnt, and their Bibles with them. Which Practice now, think you, is the righter, theirs or ours? What Authority can there be on Earth to forbid any Part of Mankind from reading what Heaven hath revealed to them? 'Tis the Law of our Lives, the Foundation of our Hopes; God hath given it to us, and Man hath no right to take it from us. But they tell us, it is from Kindness they do it: for there is great Danger that the Scripture may be misunderstood and perverted: *unlearned and unstable Men*¹, St. Peter hath de-

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 16.

clared,

clared, *may wrest it to their own Destruction.* Now this is possible indeed: and so it is possible every Thing may be applied to an ill Purpose: Health, Strength, Food, Liberty, common Day-light: but is this a Reason for taking away any of them? It is possible that Persons may do themselves Harm by having the Scriptures: but is it not something more than possible, that they may suffer Harm from the Want of them; and *be destroyed*, as the Prophet tells us, *for lack of Knowledge*^m? Why do not these Persons, who are so very cautious in this Case, show the same Caution in others, which surely need it full as much? Why do they never restrain any Body from Image Worship, for Fear of their falling into Idolatry? Why do they never forbid the Use of Indulgences, for Fear of their being mistaken for a Licence to Sin? Multitudes of Questions like these might be with equal Reason asked; and it is very strange, methinks, that they should be suspicious of nothing doing Harm but the Bible. But after all, is the Danger so very great? Hath God Almighty inspired Men to write and publish so exceedingly unsafe a Book, and so very unfit to be read by the Generality of those, for whom he

^m Hof. iv. 6.

intended it; that had not the Church of *Rome*, in their great Wisdom, forbidden Persons to look into it, without their Leave, it might have done infinite Harm, and does not a little still? We cannot think so. Men were liable to make an ill Use of Things, to fall into Errors and Heresies, in all Ages. Yet neither the Prophets under the Old Testament, nor our Saviour and his Apostles in the Times of the New, ever bethought themselves of this Way for preventing it; but recommend and enjoin the reading of Scripture in the strongest Terms. Now it is wonderful they should not be as wise as those who come after them. *St. Peter* himself, who mentions this Danger of Men's *wresting the Scriptures*, yet does not in the least blame, but suppose, every Man's reading them notwithstanding. And *St. Paul*, whose Epistles were the very Scriptures they wrested, yet never requires them to be kept from any one Christian of the several Churches he writes to; nay, most strictly requires the contrary, concerning an Epistle as liable to be misunderstood as any of them all; and which actually was misunderstood immediately, I mean his first Epistle to the *Thessalonians*. Yet notwithstanding that, *I charge you by the Lord*, says he, *that this Epistle*

be read unto all the holy Brethren ⁿ. Did then the ancient Christians, in whose Days there were Heresies in great Plenty, did they restrain any of the People from reading the Scriptures, in order to preserve them from Heresy? No: the *Romanists* do not pretend it. They well know, that a Man's delivering up his Bible was always, as it ought to be, the Mark of Apostasy from Religion. They know there is no one Thing almost so much insisted on by Fathers and Councils as the Necessity that all Persons without Exception should be well acquainted with the Word of God. Thus little apprehensive was the primitive Church of any Danger from this Practice. The Church of *Rome*, we own, has some Cause to be apprehensive. For had the People once general Liberty to read and judge from Scripture, there is great Danger they might come in general to see, what now they who do see dare not own, how widely it differs from the Doctrines commonly taught them. We acknowledge then they are *wise in their Generation*. The Scripture is against them; and they will be against the Scripture: lower its Credit as far as they dare: keep it out of Men's Hands where they can: and where they

ⁿ 1 Theff. v. 27.

cannot, they pervert it by false Translations, obscure it by false Glosses, and *make it of none Effect* by setting up a pretended Authority of interpreting it to quite another Thing than it evidently means. We, God be thanked, need not these Arts, and we use them not. We permit, we beseech, we require you all to read the Scriptures diligently, and judge of their Meaning impartially; to compare with them every Thing we teach you, and believe nothing but what you find agreeable to them. We have no Fear of your being poisoned by the Food of Life, or led into Error by the Word of Truth. On the contrary we know not any surer Way of preserving Men from Errors, and those of the Church of *Rome* in particular, than that which *St. Paul* prescribes *Timothy* in the third Chapter of his second Epistle. *This know, that in the last Days perilous Times shall come. Evil Men and Seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in those Things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of: knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a Child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by Inspiration*

tion of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.

There are still many other Points, in which great Corruptions of the *Romish* Church might be shown you. Such is their equalling the Apocryphal Books to the canonical: which the ancient Christians did not. Such is their modern Addition of five new Sacraments to those two which Christ appointed, and making the Belief of this precise Number essential to Salvation; making also the Priest's Intention so necessary to the Benefit of the Sacraments, that no Body shall be the better for them without it: a Person baptized, for Instance, shall be no Christian notwithstanding, if the Priest had Malice enough to design he should not. Of the same bad Tendency is their burying every Part of Religion under a Load of Rites and Ceremonies, that turn it into outward Show; and giving it the Appearance of Art magic by an Infinity of absurd Superstitions, many of them the undeniable Remains of Heathenism very little disguised: their engaging such Multitudes of People in Vows of Celibacy and useless Retirement from the World: their obliging them to

filly Austerities and Abstinences of no real Value, as Matters of great Merit: their excessive Veneration of Relics, most of them fictitious and unfit to be thus honoured, were they ever so genuine: their Inventions of romantic Legends and lying Miracles, which make weak and unlearned Persons believe any Thing, and too many of those, who see through them, believe nothing. And besides these and other Errors in spiritual Matters, there are many more of most weighty Consideration in Temporals, which they zealously maintain: their Claim of punishing whom they please to call Heretics with Penalties, Imprisonments, Tortures, Death; their excommunicating and deposing Kings; their forbidding divine Worship through whole Nations at once; their annulling the most sacred Promises and Engagements, when made to the Prejudice of their Church: their drawing, by wicked Artifices, the Wealth of all Countries to the Support of their own Tyranny. But many of these Things I have set in a proper Light to you on other Occasions, and dwelling on all would be endless as well as unnecessary. Enough, I hope, hath been said, to shew you which are in the right: and that *this is the true Grace of God wherein ye stand*. For observe:

as the whole Claim of the Church of *Rome* depends upon her being in all Points infallible: so, if in any single Point she proves to be mistaken, her Pretence of being believed in the rest falls intirely to the Ground. But indeed, though for your fuller Satisfaction I have confuted many of her Doctrines, yet any Person may have sufficient Satisfaction of his own being in the right Way, without so much as knowing or having heard what any one of her Doctrines is. For let him but keep close to the Creed and the Commandments; believe those Things which Scripture hath made necessary to be believed, and do those Things which Scripture hath made necessary to be done; and he is under no Manner of Obligation to enquire, what any Church on Earth thinks fit to believe or do besides. Many Opinions may be true and useful; many Practices may be innocent and edifying; but nothing can be Matter of Necessity, except what Christ and his Apostles have required as Terms of Salvation. Every Person, that complies with these, is a true Christian: every Church that teaches these, is a true Church: and neither Ignorance nor Error about any other Matters can forfeit our Title to everlasting Life. Search
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then the Scriptures and see: is there any one Thing made necessary there which our Church forbids? Is there any one Thing declared sinful there which our Church requires? If not, let other Churches prohibit or enjoin as they please at their own Peril. We are no Way bound to inquire what they do, or why. Letting alone their Peculiarities, we are sure is safe. Whether making Use of them be or not, is their Business to consider, not ours. So that were Transubstantiation, for Instance, and Purgatory true; were the Worship of Images and praying to Saints lawful; which, God knows, they are far from being; yet as there is no Pretence that they are necessary Doctrines and Practices; the Mistake of rejecting them could have no Harm in it; but the Uncharitableness of condemning and cursing those who reject them may have great Harm. For when once Christ hath said, believe and do such and such Things, and you shall be saved; who is it that shall dare to say, believe and do more, or you shall not be saved? It is dreadful Arrogance, therefore, which the Church of *Rome* shows in this Respect; coining new Articles of Faith, some of which they own were not Articles of Faith from the Beginning, and sentencing Men to Hell for not believing what,

what, before that Sentence, themselves acknowledge no Body was bound to believe. This, you see, is changing the Terms of the Christian Covenant arbitrarily, and making a new Gospel at their own Pleasure. But in Opposition to their Decisions and *Anathemas*, hear one of St. Paul: *Though an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we, the Apostles of Christ, have preached, let him be accursed.* Trust then yourselves on this Foot: for *other Foundation can no Man lay, than that which they laid*°. Nor indeed did the primitive Church, for several hundreds of Years, attempt it, or make any Doctrine necessary, which we do not: as the learned well know from their Writings; and the unlearned may know from the most ancient of their Creeds, which we now use in our constant Service. Afterwards indeed needless Additions first crept in, then false ones: but, had they begun ever so much sooner, our Cause had received no Prejudice. *To the Law and to the Testimony*, as the Prophet directs, we appeal: *if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them*².

° 1 Cor. iii. 11.

² Is. viii. 20.

S E R M O N XVI.

I PET. V. 12.

—*Exhorting and testifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye stand.*

I COME now to conclude the Subject on which I have been so long employed. A sufficient Number of the Doctrines of the *Romanists* have been considered, and what they plead for them, examined. But besides the Pleas they make for each in particular, they have others for all in general. Should they, when they want to make a Convert, fairly propose to him each of their Notions separately, and give him Proofs, first that it is true, and then that it obliges him to quit our Communion for theirs; this they are sensible would be a hopeless Undertaking. And therefore very wisely they are for shorter Work, and have general Arguments, it seems, to prove that, let their
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Doctrines or ours be what they will, we must be in the wrong, and they in the right.

One of these Arguments is their Infallibility, but this I hope was fully confuted in my first Discourse, and indeed in every one since. For it is in vain for them to pretend they cannot be mistaken, if it appear but in any single Instance that they are.

Another is, that *Protestants*, not being of the *Roman Church*, are not of the *Catholic Church*: for the *Catholic Church* is but one, and, out of it, there is no Salvation. Now, we acknowledge it is but one Body under one Head, Christ Jesus; but then in this one Body there are many Members; and why are not the Churches of *Greece*, *Asia*, and *Africa*; why is not ours, as true a Member of it as theirs? On what Authority, if Names were worth disputing about, do they ingross that of *Catholic* to themselves? Do not we profess the true Catholic Faith, that Faith which the Universal Church received from the Apostles? We profess it much purer than they. Are the Sacraments more duly administered by them than by us? Far from it: For of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, one half they have taken away from the Laity; and concerning the other half, they have taught
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the most monstrous Absurdities, and built on them the most shocking Idolatry. Then, for that of Baptism, we administer it with Water alone, just as Christ appointed, whereas they have added Oil, Salt, Spittle, and I know not what, as if it were on Purpose to make it as unlike his Institution as they can. Is then the Appointment or Ordination of their Clergy more valid, or more regular than ours? On no Account whatever. For if they brought down the Succession uninterrupted to the Reformation, we have certainly preserved it uninterrupted since; which now they may be ashamed to deny, since a learned Man of their own Communion hath fully proved it. And consequently, for them, who are but a very unsound Part of the Catholic Church, to call themselves the whole of it, is quite as absurd, as for a diseased Limb (though perhaps the larger for being diseased) to be called the whole Body. But they will say, we separated, and so cut off ourselves from the Catholic Church, at the Reformation. I answer, we did not. We only cast out, as was our Duty, the Errors that were crept in: and we did it by the lawful Authority of our Superiors, both Ecclesiastical and Civil. Upon which, the Church of *Rome*, instead of imitating

ing our good Example, commanded all they could influence, to quit our Communion. 'Tis they then who made the Separation, and 'tis they that continue it. We are ready still to join in Communion with them, upon the Terms of the Gospel: and they refuse to join with us, but upon Terms of their own devising. Now when two Churches break Communion with one another; though it is always a Fault, yet it does not always follow, that either of them is thereby broken off from the Catholic Church, any more than it follows, that when two Men break off Acquaintance, one of them is broken off from the Civil Society to which they belong. But when one Church shall excommunicate another, merely because the Governors of that other made such Alterations in it as Scripture warrants, and because the People complied with those Alterations, such an Instance of Presumption and Uncharitableness is much more likely to cut off those that use it from the Church of Christ, than those against whom it is used. But supposing we had even acted without, and separated from, our Church Governors, as our Protestant Brethren abroad were forced to do: was there not a Cause? When the Word of God was hidden from Men, and his

his Worship performed in an unknown Tongue; when pernicious Falsehoods were required to be professed, and sinful Terms of Communion to be complied with; when Church-Authority, by supporting such Things as these, became inconsistent with the Ends for which it was established: what Remedy was there but to throw it off, and form new Establishments? If in these there were any Irregularities, they were the Faults of those who forced Men into them; and are of no Consequence in Comparison with the Reason that made a Change necessary. For were a Man to separate himself from every Church he knows on Earth, in Order to obey the Laws of Christ, he would still be a most valuable Member of that *general Assembly and Church of the First-born, that are written in Heaven*^a. *For what Communion hath Light with Darknes?—And what Agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols?—Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my Sons and Daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*^b.

But 'tis an Article of Faith, they tell us, that the Church of *Rome* is the Mother and Mistress of

^a Heb. xii. 23. ^b 2 Cor. vi. 15, 16, 17, 18.

all Churches, and therefore to cast off her Authority, can never be lawful. We answer, the Mother of all Churches, she certainly is not. For in *Jerusalem* was the first Christian Society, and from thence were derived many others, more ancient than that of *Rome*. Nor was that Church the Mother of the *British* Churches, nor of all the *English*. But had the first Persons that founded the Gospel here been sent from *Rome*, that had given them no Manner of Authority over us. Whence is she then the Mistress? Why, *St. Peter* was Head of the Church, and the Bishops of *Rome* are his Successors. But the Scripture tells us, *Christ is Head of the Church*^c, and tells us of no other. We own it was said to *St. Peter*, *Upon this Rock will I build my Church*^d. But this Rock, for ought they can ever prove, might be, not *St. Peter's* Person, but his Confession made immediately before: that *Jesus was the Christ*. Or, if the Church was to be built on *St. Peter*, yet not on him alone, but upon the Foundation of all the Apostles and Prophets, as *St. Paul* teaches expressly^e. And accordingly, the Wall of the new *Jerusalem*, or Church of God, is said to have twelve Foundations, on which were the

^c Eph. i. 22. iv. 15.^d Matt. xvi. 18.^e Eph. ii. 20.

Names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb¹. To St. Peter indeed it was promised, that the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven should be given him, and that whatever he bound or loosed on Earth, should be bound or loosed in Heaven². But this very same, and other as great Things, are said to all the Apostles equally³. St. Peter was appointed by Christ to feed his Sheep⁴: but so surely was every one of them. The first Rank therefore he might have among the Apostles; but Authority over them not the least. On the contrary, St. Paul tells us, that he withstood St. Peter to the Face, because he was to be blamed⁵, and says of himself, in two different Places, that he was in nothing behind, not a whit behind, the very chiefest Apostles⁶. But had St. Peter possessed ever so much Authority, what is that to the Church of Rome? Why; St. Peter was Bishop of Rome. But even this is what they can never prove, nor is it probable. Or if he was, perhaps it was only of the Jewish Christians at Rome. For St. Paul tells us, the Gospel of the Uncircumcision was committed to him, and that of the Circumcision to Peter⁷;

¹ Rev. xxi. 14.² Matt. xvi. 19.³ Matt. xviii. 18.

John xx. 23.

⁴ John xxi. 15, 16, 17.⁵ Gal. ii. 11.⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 5. xii. 11.⁷ Gal. ii. 7.

and the *Jewish* Church there is extinct. Or if Bishop of all *Rome*, he was Bishop, they say, also of *Antioch*; and why must their Church inherit his Authority more than that Church? But why indeed must it be inherited at all? It was given personally to St. *Peter* as an Apostle: what had others to do with it who were no Apostles, though they did succeed him as Bishops? All Pre-eminence of one Church above another was nothing originally, but an Institution of Men for Convenience and Order. *Rome* being the chief City in the World, it was natural to look on the Bishop of *Rome* as the chief Bishop. And Precedence being thus allowed them; by Time and Opportunity, and Arts that were often very wicked ones, they improved it into a Claim of Authority: to which, though not near the whole Church ever submitted, yet at Length a great Part did. Then to the Pre-rogative, of which they had thus by Degrees got Possession, they begun to pretend Christ himself had originally given them a Right. And having managed so well, that Part of the World believed them, and Part durst not contradict them; they took on them the Title of universal Bishops, which one of themselves not long before had declared, whoever should take, was the

the Forerunner of Antichrist. And then under this they claimed all Power over the Souls, Bodies, and Fortunes of Men, and exercised it with all possible Insolence, Rapaciousness, Cruelty and Impiety.

Now what could there be done when such a Power was thus acquired, and thus exercised, but to throw it off, and assert that Liberty to which we had an undoubted Right? For as to any Scheme of coming to Terms, never did the Church of *Rome* recede from any one Pretension she ever made. The Exercise of Authority she hath omitted indeed, whenever she durst not exercise it: but all her Claims she hath constantly kept up, and excommunicates yearly to this Day, every Prince in *Christendom* that shall refuse Obedience to any Constitution of the Pope's whatever. 'Tis true, even the *Papish* Princes at present regard not this Excommunication, and she knows not how to make them regard it. But were once the *Protestants* reunited to that Church on the Terms of allowing her any Superiority: who knows how soon a Power, that had once risen from nothing to that formidable Height which it had attained, may rise again to be as formidable as ever?

Another of their Pleas is this: That which was the ancient Religion and Church must be the true one. Now where was your Church, say they, before *Henry* the VIIIth? Where was your Religion before *Luther*? We answer, our Church was before that Time just where it is now. Only then it was corrupted with many sinful Errors, from which it is now reformed. Still 'tis the same Church it was before: just as a Man formerly addicted to many Vices, and afflicted with many Distempers, continues the same Man, after he hath forsaken the one, and recovered from the other; and it would be very strange to make his Alteration for the better an Objection against him. And for our Religion: where was that before *Luther*? Why, wherever Christianity was. Did *Luther* invent the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the two Sacraments? These are the Things in which our Religion consists: and theirs consists in the same. Only they have added by Degrees, a Number of needless, false, and wicked Things to them, which we have cast off again. Our Religion therefore is the ancient Christianity, professed from the Days of the Apostles. But where was their Religion in those Days, I mean the Doctrines in which they differ from us?

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All of them, hundreds of Years later; many of them a thousand; some of them established no longer ago than the Council of *Trent*, which is since the Time of *Luther*. For then, and not before, was it, that they filled up the Measure of their Iniquities, which had long been growing; equalled their own Traditions to the Word of God, and added a new Creed to the old one. Our rejecting their additional Doctrines, we own, is new; and no Wonder: for the Doctrines themselves are new. Some of them indeed reigned much too long: had they been rejected sooner, it had been the better: but better late than never. Still, our denying these, is no more Part of our Religion, properly speaking, than our denying *Mahometanism*, or the Idolatry of the *Chinese*, is Part of our Religion. Were it not for their pressing them upon us, our People should never hear them mentioned. We take no Pleasure in exposing their Absurdities, but are heartily grieved at them: and have much better Employment for our Hearers than these Controversies, did not their restless Endeavours to pervert Men, make it sometimes necessary.

But this Plea of their Church being the most ancient, they sometimes put in a different Form:

and tell us, that either the *Romish* Church established here before the Reformation was the true Church, or it was not. If it was, why do we protest against it? If it was not, how can ours be a true Church, which is derived from it? The Answer is very plain. In one Respect, as their Church professed the Fundamentals of Christianity, it was, and is a true Church: and so far ours is derived from it. In another Respect, as it obscured and contradicted them by unjustifiable Doctrines and Practices, it was not a true Church; and so far we protest against it. Their Truths we have preserved: their Errors we have rejected. In one Sense we are the same Church with them still: in the other we are not the same, but a much better.

Another Way which they have of arguing against the Reformation, is aspersing the Characters of those who were engaged in it, and ascribing bad Motives to them. Now as to this: if the main Thing done was right, as it plainly was, what Sort of Instruments God employed in it, or what their personal Inducements were, is of no Consequence to us in the least. *Jehu* was an Instrument of God in destroying *Baal* out of *Israel*, and executing Vengeance on the House of *Ahab*: yet very wicked in some Respects.

pects^m. So was *Henry* the VIIIth commendable in destroying the Supremacy of the Pope, yet highly blameable in other Things. The greatest Part of the Reformers were very good Men, and acted from the best of Motives. Some of them had doubtless great Faults, and might act from bad Motives. Nay, such as meant very well, might, in particular Things, do very ill. For what constantly happened in all other Cases, no Wonder if it happened in this. However, the most blameable were not near so bad, as the Malice of their Adversaries represents them: and had they been much worse, yet they could scarce possibly be so bad as some of those Princes, and even of those Popes were, who built up the Antichristian Power, which these Men demolished.

But whatever becomes of this Comparison, still, upon the whole, theirs is the Church, they tell us, in which the most numerous and brightest Instances of Devotion, Self-denial, and good Works, have shone forth, as the many Histories of their Saints fully prove: ours is a low, carnal Religion; most of our People are very bad, few or none of them eminently good: and that must be the best Church, which makes

2 Kings x. 28—31.

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the best Men. Now the Truth is, these magnified Instances of Piety of theirs, are most of them Instances only of mere Superstition, or blind Zeal: and the Saints, which they have canonized, were, many of them, very weak, and some of them, very wicked Persons, whose Lives are pompously dressed up in Legends and Fables, to amuse and mislead the Ignorant. We, for our Parts, leave them to make a Noise with fanciful Ways of being religious; and doubt not, but we please God much better by performing quietly the real Duties of Life. And, though we acknowledge and lament that a Failure in these is too general amongst us, yet we must remind them, when they insult us upon this, that there is no where on Earth more vile and more open Wickedness, than where Popery reigns without Controul. If, when they live under Protestant Governments, they live in a more Christian Manner, we are heartily glad of it. But still we hope, even here the Lives of our People are not worse than theirs: and we are sure it is not the Fault of our Religion, if they are not much better.

But, they tell us, however these Things may be, yet their Communion is undoubtedly the safer of the two. For they say we cannot be
saved,

saved, and we own they may be saved: and that Church is plainly the safer, in which both Sides acknowledge Salvation is to be had. But consider: does their saying we are not safe, make us ever the less so in Reality? The Question is, Upon what Grounds do they say it? Why, upon none at all, as I have shown you. And therefore all they can prove by saying it, is their own Confidence, of which those Persons have generally the most, who have the least Reason for it: and their own Uncharitableness, for which, if we at all understand Christianity, no Side will ever be the safer. Well: but we do not deny, that they may be saved. No more do I or they deny, but even a virtuous Heathen may have some Degree of Happiness in another Life. Suppose then he should take it into his Head to deny that a Christian could, must I turn Heathen to be of the safer Side? You see it is just the same Case. But after all, do we lay it down as a Rule without Exception, that all Papists may be saved? We dare not say so. Some of them go much more unjustifiable Lengths than others: the ill Things that many of them do, they do in Ignorance: this, we hope, will be an Excuse for them in a great Measure. Yet, even for the most ignorant,
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their Salvation is grievously hazardous, amidst so many Corruptions, which, one should think, even They might perceive to be such, and so many Temptations to neglect that *Holiness, without which no Man shall see the Lord*. The Condition of the learned amongst them, who, when the Light is before their Eyes, continue in Darkness and keep others in it, is still more dangerous. But in the worst State of all are they, who being born *Children of Light*, return to Darkness again; and sin wilfully after they have been bred up amongst us in the Knowledge of the Truth. Yet even among these there are very different Degrees of Guilt. Such whose good Meaning hath been misled by plausible Artifices, we would still hope well of: though doubtless they must have been sinfully negligent of informing themselves concerning the Grounds of their first Belief; else they had never left it. A second Sort, who depart from what, in their Consciences, they believe is the Truth, merely because a presumptuous Man tells them they cannot be saved if they adhere to it, these are much more blameworthy than the former. But for such as, either from the Love of worldly Interest, or the wretched Hope

• Heb. xii. 14.

of reconciling Sin and Salvation together, turn aside from the Way of Righteousness, and forsake that pure and holy Communion, which the good Providence of God had placed them in; as to such, we cannot judge favourably, and we will not judge hardly; *there is one that judgeth^p, who will also render to every Man according to his Deeds^q*: but indeed we can see no Promise of their finding *Mercy in that Day*. Suffer not yourselves then to be moved either by vain Threatenings or false Promises, nor ever think to be safe in any other Way, than that of first inquiring carefully, what your Duty is; and then keeping close to the Practice of it. Be assured it is safe to worship God, through Jesus Christ, and let all other Worship alone; safe to receive the holy Communion as our Lord himself gave it, to pray in a Language you all understand; and make that holy Word *which was written for your Learning^r*, the Foundation and Rule of your Faith, your Practice, and your Hopes. Fear not but you are safe in doing thus; whether the *Romanists* be safe in doing otherwise or not. God grant they may! but God forbid that any of us should try. Bear with me now but a few Minutes longer,

^p John viii. 50.^q Rom. ii. 6.^r Rom. xv. 4.

whilst I give you in Conclusion some seasonable Directions for your Behaviour towards those of that Church.

First then let none of their bad Doctrines or Practices ever tempt you in the least to any hard Treatment of them, any Incivility or secret Ill-will towards them. Justice and Mercy, Equity and Charity, are main Parts of Religion: and a Failure in these is one of the worst Heresies into which we can fall. We know the Church of *Rome* hath failed in them greatly; our Ancestors have felt their Cruelty; our Protestant Brethren abroad groan under it at this Day, and may God preserve us and our Posterity from the Danger of it; for never had they Mercy long when they had Power. Careful Self-Defence against such a Spirit must be allowed us: but, as to any Thing farther, in those Things for which we blame them, let us not be like them. The severe Laws we have in Force against them are not for their religious Opinions; but for their refusing to own, and promise due Obedience to, the Government under which they live: and they have long Experience that nothing but absolute Necessity will ever oblige our Superiors to put any of these Laws into Execution. Let us therefore shew in our private Capacities

pacities the same good Temper. As Men, they have a Title to all Humanity: as Christians, though mistaken, they have a yet stronger Claim to our Forbearance and Tenderness. Their Doctrines indeed are dangerous; their Practices have been dreadful: but this, in a great Measure, hath arisen from Ignorance, and a *Zeal of God, though not according to Knowledge*. Numbers of them, without Doubt, inwardly disapprove religious Cruelties, and think at least they could never be brought to join in them. However this may be, (which God forbid should ever come to be tried) yet in the mean Time nothing hinders but as in Religion they may, to the best of their Judgement, be sincerely pious, so in common Life they may be just and honest, friendly and neighbourly. Let us therefore, with much better natured Principles, be sure not to appear worse natured Persons; but recommend our Profession to all the World by that *Wisdom which is from above, first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits*.

In the next Place, let nothing which hath been said make those, who are not some Way called to it, over forward to dispute about these

* Rom. x. 2.

* James iii. 17.

Matters with Persons of more Learning and Art than themselves. For a Man may have very good Reasons on his Side, and yet be so little qualified to set them in the best Light, that an excellent Cause may be hurt by Want of Skill in managing it. What I have endeavoured is only that you may be able, as St. Peter directs, *to give an Answer to them that ask you a Reason of the Hope that is in you*. In doing which, remember you are concerned only to be on the defensive. They are to prove, if they can, that every one of their Doctrines is not only true, but an Article of Faith, and every one of their Practices not only lawful, but necessary. Till they have done all this, you have no Reason to change: and when they have done it, we allow you to change. But observe one Thing: if you hear them deny any of the Points with which they have been charged, do not be staggered at it. Would to God they were not guilty of them! They would be more in the right, and we should be never the less so. But do not think a Charge unjust, because they confidently say it is. The more ignorant of them here among us, perhaps, do not know the worst Part of their Doctrines: and the more

1 Pet. iii. 15.

learned

learned will not own them till they are forced. These Concealments are no new Things with them. In some Countries many of their Missionaries have concealed a great Part of the Christianity they pretended to teach, and allowed Heathenism to be blended with it in order to make Converts, such as they are, the more easily. No Wonder then if here they veil over their Corruptions with a fair Mask, which, if we do not pull off, they will not throw off, till the proper Time comes.

Another Thing is, If ever you should be pressed with any of their Arguments which I have mentioned, and not perhaps remember the Answer to it; still remember you have heard it answered: and any one of you may, at any Time when you desire it, have the Answer repeated and farther explained to you. Or if any other Argument should be used, to which you cannot of yourselves reply, consult those that can: tell us your Difficulties in Time; be assured such as would keep you from this do not mean honestly; give us but a fair hearing before you determine to leave us, and we doubt not your staying with us. Even if any of you should be unhappily brought to think favourably of some of their Doctrines, remember still how

monstrous others of them are : and yet, if you do not swallow all, you have done nothing. We allow Persons to have very different Opinions from us in some Points, and suffer them to continue among us as very good Christians notwithstanding : but their Church makes no Abatement : their very grossest Errors must be professed, or you are none of them. Think well then what you do : and, as I once advised before, never let Subtlety and Sophistry, whether you know exactly how to answer it or not, prevail against Scripture and Reason ; but ever stick to the plain Word of God, and plain common Sense.

One Direction more I have of the utmost Importance ; which is, if ever we would secure ourselves to good Purpose against the Dangers of false Religion, let us carefully promote the Profession and Practice of the true. If Persons are bred up in no Knowledge of, and no Zeal for, the Principles of their own Church, no Wonder that they are easily carried off and seduced into another. If they are encouraged to live without Regard to God, many of them however will be afraid to die so too ; and then that Communion, which makes the largest Promises of Forgiveness on the easiest Terms, will be almost

most sure to be embraced by them. Men, wise in their own Imaginations, think they are sure to root out Superstition, if they plant Infidelity. But Mankind must and will have some Religion; and if they forsake a good one, sooner or later the Uncomfortableness of Unbelief, and the Terrors of Conscience after a wicked Life, will drive most of them to a worse. Besides, whilst we are divided and negligent about these Matters, the Emiffaries of the Church of *Rome* are united and active, and never with more sanguine Hopes, than when they can plead Experience, that the Liberty allowed by the Protestant Religion leads Men of Course to throw off all Religion. These are plain Reasons for a public Regard to Piety and Virtue: and there are yet more important ones for a private conscientious Practice of them: for that, after all, is the only Thing that will establish us in the Truth, fill our Hearts with Peace and Comfort in this Life, and give us everlasting Happiness in the next. If then you have any Concern either for the Honour of that Church to which you belong, for the Welfare of your Country, or the Salvation of your Souls, *let your Conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ* *. Pity and

* Phil. i. 27.

pray

pray for them who are in Error, that God would give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth¹, and building up yourselves, as St. Jude exhorts, on your most holy Faith, keep yourselves in the Love of God; looking for the Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal Life².

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the Presence of his Glory with exceeding Joy, to the only wise God our Saviour be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and ever. Amen³.

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 25. ² Jude, ver. 20, 21. ³ Jude, ver. 24, 25.

END of Vol. VI.



